ACADEMIC PARTNERSHIP BUILDING IN INDIGENOUS EDUCATION THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA AND DIGITAL CONTENTS IN BANGLADESH

Mashrur Imtiaz¹ & Sikder Monooare Murshed²

¹,²Department of Linguistics, University of Dhaka, Dhaka 1000, Bangladesh
email: mashrur.imtiaz@du.ac.bd, murshedsm@du.ac.bd

ABSTRACT

Language is, through both utterance and understanding, an inevitable element of human existence. In addition to being substantially endangered, indigenous languages are also digitally endangered. The digital divide that causes this danger infringes most of the indigenous community's linguistic rights. This paper will illustrate, along with this detailed background, the extent to which the indigenous communities can develop academic partnerships by digitising educational content and using Social Media. From the observation and discussion with the community members, some feasible suggestions came up that demonstrated the academic partnership as a way language documentation and teaching in MTB-MLE. The aspects of indigenous language education and connection of social media based content making is another solution tool in present days in which this paper also narrates the possibility.

Keywords: MTBMLE; Social Media; Digital Contents; Indigenous Education; Language Teaching; Language Documentation; Digital Language Divide

INTRODUCTION

Language is not only an innate medium of communication among human beings, but it has a significant place for remarking self-identity, heritage, and cultural representations as a social being. Ethnologue, which is an acclaimed language repository presents that among the 7097 living languages spoken in the world today, 50% are endangered and may disappear within this century [1]. According to UNESCO, any language with less than ten thousand speakers can be called an endangered language [2]. Therefore, is essential to preserve information about these endangered languages. There are forty-one languages found in Bangladesh so far, and among them, many are endangered. Language endangerment is a massive loss for a country as it damages the cultural diversity, and thus indigenous communities gradually lose their language and culture. To document linguistic diversity within all the remaining languages, language documentation is an essential one [3]. Therefore, documented languages are obtained, which are mainly endangered as the major outcome of language
documentation. Moreover, by solving complex descriptive and analytical problems, testing theories, encountering alternative ways of being/living/talking, it is possible to attain intellectual contentment that will directly support social innovation in many practical ways. With the emerging of Mother-tongue Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) in Bangladesh, modern aspects like digital contents and the usage of social media for academic purposes in endangered indigenous languages could become an effective new tool. These collaborations would also enhance the academic partnership among the educational institutions and indigenous communities in Bangladesh. This paper aims to portray the practical possibilities and scopes of academic partnership created through the social media and digital contents in contemporary Bangladeshi context.

METHODOLOGY

The study was designed and conducted based on the multi-method qualitative approach and executed in three phases. Research questions were as follows: (a) how could digital language diversity be enhanced and maintained among indigenous communities?; (b) How to bridge through academic partnership within academia and community for conducting language documentation?; (c) how would academic partnership in indigenous education through social media and digital contents in Bangladesh be of effect?

This research was qualitative and there were two phases of data collection. In the first preparatory phase, the study design was set up to create two semi-structured formats for (i) focus group discussion and (ii) observation on the language documentation project. There were 10 community members both from the hillside and plain land indigenous communities and they were part of the basic documentation project. There were interactions with them through engaging focused group discussion. Most of them were males and the age range was 20-30 years. In the second phase of the study, at the virtual sphere, representatives of teachers, educators and other relevant people concerning indigenous languages were observed and interviewed. This phase also involved spreading the language and e-contents both for raising awareness and creativity of the teacher and educators of indigenous language. Combining technology and education, it was possible to gradually document all the endangered languages of Bangladesh. The social cohesion of the indigenous community was ensured by the direct participant as a language consultant in language documentation program of the linguistics department at the University of Dhaka. This particular language documentation initiative would support the indigenous communities to preserve their endangered languages by documenting them in education as they would have the scope get their education in their language. Moreover, to ensure meaningful connectivity with members of other languages groups and cultures and relive their unique ethnic and social events, this would collectively ensure the
social cohesion. After the documentation, all the digitalized data could be used as
the contents of digital educational entities and social media posts. Thus the
academic partnership that occurred as well as the outcome would ensure the
productive outcomes like digital educational contents and social media posts. The
possible outcome would illustrate some focal points on contemporary situation of
indigenous languages on the web; some recommendations from the respondents
and the possibilities of creating academic partnership.

Background: The Nature of Linguistic Rights

The Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights which is commonly known as
Barcelona Declaration, is a document signed by the International PEN Club, and
many NGOs in 1996 to support linguistic rights, especially those of endangered
languages. This declaration of linguistic right is an outstanding memorandum for
endangered indigenous languages that covers the rightful linguistic aspects of
communication media and new technologies for the indigenous language [4].
Section IV of the Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights is entitled as
‘Communications media and new technologies’ and it is represented from article
35 to article 40. Moreover, the Fact Sheet of the UN Permanent Forum on
Indigenous Issues, claims that –

Language rights are inadequately recognized in many countries and are often
neglected by national legislation and policy. Certain languages are given
official status and recognition while the majority of languages, particularly
indigenous languages, are denied legal recognition. Indigenous languages and
their speakers are diminished and made to seem inferior, thus allowing for
discriminatory policies and practices [5].

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous also declared the
basic ideas on developing policies and laws close to the promotion and
strengthening of indigenous languages. Along with the measures needed to
protect and promote indigenous languages include, the following rights were
considered as the primal ones (extracted from Articles 13, 14 and 16. European
Charter for Regional or Minority Languages is another important milestone for
the recognition of the indigenous languages and their rights. In Article 8, ensuring
all levels of education were remarked and fulfilling all the rightful issues about
educational facilities were introduced. In Article 11, the spreading out media or
digital media in many spheres were remarked, and needless to say – the media
should prioritise the indigenous languages. Eisenlohr [6] argues that a presence in
new technologies facilitates better appreciation of a language, by establishing a
positive association with modernity and relevance to current lifestyles [6].
Nowadays, most of the language supported interaction consists of Computer
Mediated Communication (CMC), and this CMC has an direct impact on the
following - Bi/Multilingual practices in the multilingual situation [7]; Language
education for the learners and educators [8]; Communication and language use in
Digital Linguistic Diversity and Endangerment

The digital world has become a significant ground to protect linguistic diversity, according to the concept of David Crystal. Digital media and instruments constitute only one of the different possible contexts of language use, but they are essential for protecting the interests of these languages [13]. According to a study conducted in 2011, digital content in 2012 increased to 2,837 zettabytes, nearly 50 percent from 2011, on its manner to 8.5 zettabytes, by 2015 [14]. In 2013, the social network user community in Western Europe was set to reach 174.2 million individuals, about 62% of Internet users. Facebook users are a huge 800 million individuals, 170 of whom come from extremely linguistically varied nations like Brazil, India, Indonesia, and Mexico. The number of active users of Twitter is estimated at approximately 200 million. There are 115 million users in LinkedIn and 180 million in Google+. Aside from English, Spanish and Portuguese, only five other EU languages (German, French, Italian, Polish and Netherlands), out of the Union's 60 or more spoken languages, are released on more than 1% of the top million locations [14]. A research by W3Techs2 demonstrates that 55.9 percent of all internet content is in English when writing this article. The Internet, therefore seems very different from a linguistic perspective. The language in which more content is produced as well as the language preferred by most clients is still used most frequently on the Internet.

The internet is dominated by a linguistic gap with several languages paralleling and strengthening the digital divide. Just as areas of the world lacking Internet access, whole languages cannot access the Internet. Such a gap in the digital language has serious implications. The statistics of Digital Language Divide were presented by [15] and [16]. From these studies, it is observed that 56% of all web based content is found to be in English, on the contrary the rest 25% divided among German, Russian, Portuguese, French, Spanish, Chinese and Japanese. As only the speakers of certain dominant languages can look forward to accessing the Internet, it will be significantly impacted by their use and usability. In less commonly spoken languages, the quantity of data and services are decreased, creating inequality at distinct rates [17]: inequality of linguistic rights and digital opportunities for all languages and all citizens; inequality of information and access to services; unequal access to technological development and unequal digital dignity; unequal opportunities for language survival. In addition to the lack of access to Internet services in certain countries and poor digital skills across the globe, the failure to support languages other than the major languages means that speakers in 94 % of spoken languages cannot access
Internet services unless they have the knowledge to speak a major language. Concerning digital vitality, the dominant model is found in Komai’s paper Digital Language Death, which aims to adapt the EGIDS (which is language endangerment scale) in particular to presence and absence of languages on the Internet. Later on, [18] provided an extended version of the framework. As per [15], the indigenous languages (Chakma and Santali) are at Heritage (H), while in framework of [18], the languages are at Emergent (E) stage. One of the primary advantages of the Internet for minority languages is the relative ease of content production, with a blog, for example, needing much less infrastructure than a book to produce. The Internet can also be an ideal medium for collaborative work between speakers at different locations, allowing diaspora members to fully contribute to digital language activities and to whom the more educated members of the community may belong. Gibson [19] came up with detailed discussion on how the Internet can be helpful for minority languages. Therefore, it is important to reduce this digital language divide, and academic partnership along with making digital or social media based content creation can reduce this divide as well reduce the digital language endangerment [19].

**Indigenous Language Practice on the Web and in the Social Media in Bangladesh**

There are personal profile and several social groups of indigenous communities on social networking websites like Facebook in Bangladesh. The consultants of this study belong to the Chakma and Santali communities and they stated that they use this social networking platform as the tool of communication, a zone for exchange of information, or simply share their daily regular and cultural activities through language. They also remarked among the community users they use the transliterated form of their very own languages like Chakma and Santali. In addition, [20] noted that social network is an ideal tool to address the current problems concerning cultural and linguistic identity. This observation displays the usage of the indigenous language in social networking websites by questioning if it could represent a means to protect a specific cultural identity, as in the case of the Santali and Chakma. To analyse the usage of their very own language within a social media sphere, some digital contents (YouTube, videos, Facebook pages and groups, texting on mobile phones etc) were looked into. Having analysed data from these different digital platforms, it can be assumed that:

- Apart from their very own indigenous languages used on the digital media, language users also use the Bangla (the main language in Bangladesh) and English in some few extents.
- The orthographic patterns or the common ways of writings are not as well-unified and there is common use of transliteration in English, both in
case of Santali and Chakma. Perhaps due to the lack of a ‘standardised’
writing system is showing this scenario in the written aspect.

- Most of the user is young and internet friendly and they are keen to use
their mother tongue even in the virtual zone.

From the language practice on the web and in the social media in
contemporary Bangladesh perspective, some positive aspects the promotion of
language based contents among indigenous communities could be figured out. The major key points are presented below:

- There would be a holistic unification of linguistic and cultural identity
among the users of social media.
- There are ways of interaction among with language communities in spite
of the limitation of space and time. Different age groups are also having
linguistic interaction in social media.
- The direct of language practice is present in here; though it might be the
transliterated one, but it raises the awareness of a profound writing
system.
- The sharing and spreading of knowledge are possible in here. Contents
like songs, rhymes, folk tales, myths, etc are possible to post in digital
media or on the social networking groups.

Apart from these possible positive outcomes, there were some probable
problems, which were present and yet to be solved, such as not having the proper.idea of social networking and effective posting in these groups. Thus unnecessary
and weird contents came up on the surface among these groups

DISCUSSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Ways to Enhance and Maintain Digital Language Diversity

Some suggestions which can enhance the presence of indigenous languages to
be visible on digital media and also maintain the digital language diversity in an
apprehensive are remarked below:

- Development of practical writing systems or perhaps the standardized
orthographic patterns for all the indigenous languages;
- Promotion and bridging of a literate educational environment for all the
Bangladeshi indigenous languages; Language documentation can lift this
promotion and bridging;
- Production and sharing of diversified kinds of literature in digital format
through digital media and social platform, including folktales, myths,
rhymes, puzzles, oral texts etc;
- Specific cultural translation and terminology development for different
language user groups of indigenous online linguistic communities;
Development of websites and mobile applications in very own indigenous languages is a truly required one;

Involving the indigenous communities for the creation of certain kind of posts and contents in digital for every possible way of education, pieces of teacher training, entertainment, networking etc. and

Establishing a connection among linguists and computer scientists for the proper language technology creation in indigenous languages is the last but not the least one. Language technology can bring out the smooth formulation of both digital contents and academic partnership.

If the digital language presence becomes equal among all the indigenous languages, there would be plenty of positive impacts. If the indigenous language presence by academic partnership along with digital contents and social media is ensured, there will be some possible yet subtle outcomes which have mentioned by different researches. It will (a) create a positive image and associate it with modern life of the endangered indigenous language ([16]; (b) reduce the digital divide and also enables the wider population to become aware of linguistic diversity [16]; (c) reinforce the link between language and the speaker and its identity, which in turn helps to build credibility in another language; (d) encourage the use of the indigenous language among people in various contexts [10].

Bridging Through Academic Partnership Within Academia and Community

Creating sustainable academic partnerships with indigenous communities includes study, research, and monitor in between the academia and the members of indigenous communities. Thus finding a possible partner, developing the shared vision, gaining institutional commitment from all partners and creating a long-lasting rapport and work progress would construct a real result-oriented academic partnership. In this partnership; sharing of the documentation works including documentary corpus, grammatical description, multilingual dictionary, ethnographic description of the community, reading materials which can be used in the educational aspects all will be included. As social cohesion depicts the willingness of members of a community to cooperate with each other in order to survive and prosper, the innovative idea of merging academicians and indigenous communities will ensure the progress of social cohesion in a unique way. Additionally, they would be able to learn about the amazing properties of new languages in interesting and challenging ways; these properties will sharpen the scope of the learning process of linguistic ability in an influential way.

Language is an innate medium of communication among human beings. However, the usage of language depends on the social situation. Decreasing speaker number is not the only reason responsible for language extinction; the state or the government also plays a very crucial part. The collective effort of the relative language communities and institutions can play a great role in this
regard as well. In the present context, the indigenous communities are becoming less interested in their mother tongue, which is not a positive signal for their future generation. This social innovation will make them aware of the importance of mother language as an important feature of social life. Therefore, it is vital to take initiatives to preserve the endangered languages of Bangladesh. The University of Dhaka is a public university in Bangladesh that can operate some individual research on language documentation and preservation. The Department of Linguistics of the university is the major academic hub on language-based research. Application of modern methods of linguistics can increase language usage among comparable speakers. Extinction of a language is a massive loss for a country as it damages cultural diversity. This is why it is vital to take initiatives to preserve the endangered languages of Bangladesh with linguistic documentation properly. As mentioned before, the language documentation process was not a very familiar idea in Bangladesh. As the central linguistics based educational hub, the department of linguistics at the University of Dhaka can become the primary place for the documentation processing of all the indigenous languages of Bangladesh. Language documentation initiative is a new idea that will introduce the combined approach of different indigenous community members as the key part of the research group. Ranging from low-mid-high offline technologies are highly adaptable from Bangladeshi point of view. Besides these, online technologies are being popular as it can be used to translate, catalogue, store, and provide information and access to languages. The integration of technology could promote efforts for Indigenous language storage, revitalization, and maintenance programs. This can extend the horizon of teacher training education for the indigenous community as well.

The digital education can also ensure the present educational concept of MTB-MLE in Bangladeshi indigenous education. The formal initiation of Multilingual Education (MLE) schools in different places of Bangladesh has begun a decade ago. From the implementation of MLE based upon respective language and culture, children would learn other languages better [21]. MTB-MLE is that strategy which can help in the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) supporting access to the relevant basic education for every child regardless of their ethnic, cultural or religious background. The National Education Policy 2010 of Bangladesh clearly remarked the need of MTB-MLE for indigenous children at primary level for their inclusion to the holistic education system [22].

Some Recommendations

This whole conversation pointed to the endangered linguistic diversity in the globe and how to face the issue by academic partnership for creating digital contents in social media. Only by reducing the language extinction rates could the prevention of such a threat and the maintenance of linguistic diversity be
re-established. Academic partnership, creating digital contents in indigenous languages, making social networking websites available among indigenous groups, promoting MTB-MLE, teacher training through modern technologies – all these initiatives would become result effective if some certain activities are present in real life. The responses which can be recommended to ensure the academic partnership in indigenous education through social media and digital contents in Bangladesh, are as follows:

- Collaboration of resources and language stabilization expertise between communities and organizations.
- In order for the communities and the individual to access them, all languages must be documented and described. A dictionary or grammar can be a practical force affecting language status and can form the basis for preparing the material for language revitalization.
- As a way of documenting or revitalizing a language is not available, setting goals is an essential function for every language community, and includes setting goals for who to learn, who to learn, what to document and preserve, and how to measure success.
- The most obvious factor of significance for indigenous groups is the very own language use. The value of its language must be persuaded of all indigenous communities.
- Promote awareness of the devastating effects of language deterioration among language speakers and the population as a whole, in particular leaders and policy makers. Exemplify that the language is as complicated as the dominant language and is suitable for communication.
- Restoring language pride and value is important because it involves active support and intervention of individuals in the whole community and the development of teachers and curricula designed to meet current and future requirements for language learning and teaching.
- The achievement of language maintenance initiatives must be done by parents, school administrators, public officials, community leaders and even linguists. It is crucial to achieve much more cooperation, from individuals and organizations through partnership.

CONCLUSIONS

The subtle state of the MTB-MLE academia relationship could become more viable through digital content-based education and social media. Establishing a separate institution to preserve and practice the indigenous languages would be a primary step. Online media like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, blogs-can channelize the positive campaign for the indigenous languages, and henceforth the culture. The storage of oral indigenous language has options to comprise technologies, such as audio, video, and multimedia as a means to further
documentation and preservation. The written properties of indigenous languages are modifiable with technology-based publishing, sharing and archiving. The existing mainstream media like television and television should provide some slots for the specific on-air programs based on the indigenous languages – the spreading of this media-based activity would be more feasible via sharing through all the social media. Moreover, the inclusion will be self-driven, the indigenous people would be familiar with the theoretical aspects and practicality of linguistic methods. This will also make the concern about the importance of preservation of their own language and culture. It is possible to involve indigenous community members, students and researchers of this department to create an endangered language archive. Involved persons thus have the opportunity to develop innovative language preservation procedure and publishing primer language-book by spending voluntary research hours in the language lab of the department. After the documentation, it would be influential for making the indigenous grammar books and primers. The teacher training materials could be converted into the very own on indigenous language. Government has e-contents in the national web portal – documenting these languages will help the e-contents of the indigenous teachers and trainers. The inclusion of the indigenous communities with the academic arena by the interactive way of digital contents and social media would really build a trustworthy relationship between the language practitioner and the educators; and thus, could enhance the linguistic resources for supporting improved education for the indigenous community as well.

REFERENCES