

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

One of the common and natural processes that a language experiences is that it changes and evolves over time and scholars had long been aware of this fact (Lyons 179). However, it was only in the 19th century (1820's-1870's) with the development of the principles of historical linguistics it was established that language change is a regular, continuous and universal process (Ibid 179). Most of the modern languages descended in some sense from some ancient languages. For instance it's known that English developed from Anglo-Saxon and languages like Italian, French and Spanish originated from Latin (Ibid 179).

It is due to the fact that living languages go through the process of changeⁱ all the time (Ibid 179) that it becomes difficult for people of one generation to conveniently read and understand the written works of few centuries earlier. For instance the works of Chaucer who wrote in London dialect of Middle English (Ibid 182) probably were a great delight to the English readers of his time but are no longer easy to read and understand for the present generation due to changes in English language of today.

No language (including Bodo) is exempt from the process of change and evolution. There could be various reasons for language to evolve but Edward Sapirⁱⁱ suggests that contact of one language with another is a necessary condition in order that a particular language changes (Sapir 93). Charles Darwinⁱⁱⁱ applies his theory of natural selection in the context of language change as well, he suggests that most languages have the tendency to adopt shorter and easier forms so as to survive and continue flourish

(Lightfoot 227). Various theories of language change are discussed in the chapters that follow.

A close observation of the contemporary Bodo verbal language manifests numerous English words that the individuals of the community use for their day to day communication. This probably is also the case of many Northeast Indian language groups; it is an undeniable fact that today English words have found fashionable place in our conversations. The native language used at T.V shows, modern songs, films and social speeches seems to have a tinge of English vocabulary in them. This practice is becoming more and more common with each passing generation. Such a practice does bring about some changes to a language. The contemporary Bodo linguistic community too is experiencing such kind of influence.

This research carries out an in-depth study and analysis of how the Bodos as a linguistic community employ English words to communicate with one another while conversing in the native Bodo language. Sometimes the users of those English words use them knowingly at other times unknowingly. The research attempts to highlight the phenomenon of adaptation of English words among the native speakers of Bodo language and evoke awareness of this current practice within the linguistic community. The research employs qualitative approach in trying to understand the historical^{iv} and linguistic reasons behind such a practice among the Bodos.

The research adopts Edward Sapir's theoretical framework that suggests the role of borrowing or loanwords as one of the fundamental causes of language change. His theory is used in the research in order to analyze the practice of borrowing English words

in native Bodo colloquial context. It is an old practice among linguistic groups to borrow lexical items from another group for daily use which then gradually leads the community to adopt them as one of their own (Sapir 93). The practice of borrowing continues up to the present day. In fact, with the influence of Mass media it has even become easier and habitual practice among language groups in the contemporary times.

The usage of borrowed English words may or may not have found wide usage in the literary works written in the native Bodo language. However, the practice is clearly observable in the verbal usage of the language. And the research delves in the area of conversational usage of the Bodo language and not so much in the literary works/written works of the language because all languages originate as spoken dialects and similarly change in language is initiated by the acquisition and use of the associated spoken language (Lyons 180).

The thesis attempts to answer why English words have been voluntarily accepted and widely used by the native speakers of Bodo language while conversing in the native language itself. It also looks at some of the possible drawbacks of such a practice besides looking at the advantages of borrowing.

A close observation of the spoken form of the Bodo language exhibits the wide usage of English words in their conversations. This phenomenon is commonly seen among Bodo speakers of small towns as well as people residing in interior villages. It is also true that this practice is visible even among the people who have had no English education. The samples collected for analyzing varies from educated to the illiterate and people living in the towns to the people living in villages. Sometimes some of the

borrowed words are used in literal sense and at other times the words are used to refer to things that may not connote the same meaning as in the original language (for instance the use of the English word 'policy' among common Bodos do not have the same connotation as in English).

The use of borrowed English words does aid in making communication in native language easier. However, the mass usage of such borrowed terms could gradually lead to replacement of some of the already existing lexical items and consequently certain change in the way the language is spoken.

The research intends to explicate Edward Sapir's theory of 'Loanwords' and its role in language change; to highlight the influence of English words in the context of Bodos (a tribal linguistic community of Assam.) And to discuss various other theories that explain the reasons behind language change within a linguistic community. Compared to other theories of language change, 'Loanwords/borrowing' seems to have had much impact on the Bodo linguistic community.

Hypothesis

Language change is one of the common phenomenon in any language. In fact, it is said to be unavoidable in any linguistic community. Bodo community too has had the experience of language change in a certain way. Language contact with English as well as other neighbouring languages have had its impact on the Bodo linguistic community. One of the main reasons for the cause of language change among Bodos is due to borrowing of English words and wide usage of those words in their daily conversations.

Research Problem

Borrowing or Loanwords is one of the main reasons for a certain change we observe in the Bodo linguistic community. The extensive use of English loanwords among Bodo politicians, local artists, journalists and common people shows how susceptible the Bodo linguistic community has become to English loanwords over the years.

Research Objectives

The aim and objectives of this research is to focus on the following aspects:

To explore what language is and what are some of its characteristics; how it changes over time due to various causes. One of the main reasons behind influence of one language over another is through loanwords or borrowing of words from one distinct language to another.

To study the theory of 'Loanwords/borrowing' proposed by Edward Sapir and other linguists who suggest borrowing as one of the key factors in language change.

To analyze the influence of English 'Loanwords' on Bodo linguistic community residing in the state of Assam.

Literature Review

Many linguists have spoken about language change and discussed the causes of such a linguistic phenomenon. However, there are few linguists who focus on the role of

'loanwords' or 'borrowing' as the major cause of language change. In this research Edward Sapir's work, *Language: An Introduction to the Study of Speech* is used in attempting to explain the theory of language change. There are also other linguists who interpret his theory so they have also been referred to in passing in this research. Youtube videos of interviews and conversations of Bodos from different walks of life also form an important part of this research. They have been used as samples for analyzing the use of English words among the Bodos.

Chapterization

My dissertation consists of six chapters: Introduction, language and Theories of Language Change, Loanwords and Language Change, The History and Development of Bodo Language, The Influence of English Loanwords on Bodo Linguistic Community and Conclusion.

The first chapter of my dissertation is a general introduction. It presents an overview of the entire dissertation.

The second chapter discusses Language and attempts to define it and explore its characteristics. It also discusses various theories of Language change. The chapter explores how apart from borrowing or loan there are other theories that explain the cause of language change in a linguistic community.

The third chapter discusses the role of 'loanwords' in the process of language change. It presents how borrowing plays a key role in language change in many linguistic

communities. It also deals with how Bodo language speakers too use loanwords from English for their communication.

The fourth chapter discusses the history and development of Bodo language. It elaborates on the struggle of the Bodo language for its survival and identity. It also discusses how the Bodo linguistic community has had close interaction and relationship with other neighboring languages and scripts in the past and how they might have possibly influenced the language.

The Fifth chapter deals with the influence of English loanwords on the Bodo linguistic community. It analyses some of the interviews of prominent Bodo politicians, artists and journalists and common folk to find out whether or not they use English words in their conversations. The chapter records numerous English words used by the interviewer as well as interviewee.

The sixth chapter of my research is a general conclusion. It presents the findings of my research in brief. The findings enable the researcher to conclude that an average Bodo speaking individual is influenced to a great extent by English loanwords and use them freely in their conversations.

ⁱ In the case of modern languages like English and French it is very evident that they have experienced phonetic as well as phonological changes (Lyons 180).

ⁱⁱ Edward Sapir was born on 26 January 1884 in a place called Lauenburg, Pomerania in Germany. However, later on Lauenburg became part of Poland and today the area is known by the name Łębork. He died on 4th February 1939 in New Haven, Connecticut, U.S.A. He was most widely known for his contributions to the study of North American Indian languages. He founded 'Ethnolinguistics,' which

studies the relationship between culture and language; he was also a principal developer of the American (descriptive) school of structural linguistics (“Edward Sapir | Biography, Linguistics, & Facts”).

ⁱⁱⁱ Charles Darwin was born on 12th February 1809 in Shrewsbury, Shropshire, England and died on 19th April 1882 in Downe, Kent, English. He was a naturalist whose scientific theory of evolution by natural selection became the foundation of modern evolutionary studies. Darwin at first shocked the religious Victorian society by suggesting that animals and humans shared a common ancestry. However, his non-religious biology appealed to the rising class of professional scientists and by the time of his death evolutionary imagery had spread through all of science, literature, and politics. He formulated his bold theory between 1837 to 39 after returning from a voyage around the world aboard HMS Beagle. However, it was not until two decades later that he finally gave it full public expression in his famous work “On the Origin of Species” (1859); a book that has deeply influenced modern Western society and thought (Desmond).

^{iv} When we talk about historical reasons it would mean studying the possibility of influence of other neighbouring languages on the Bodo language. In the context of Assam it appears that Bodo language too has had influence on other languages. However, the Bodo language of today has had the experience of being influenced by other languages. The struggle of the Bodos in order to choose a script as well as recognition of the language in India shows how the language has had influence of other languages.