

# Theoretical foundation of the discipline and documentation & exploration of endangered languages

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## **Best Practice**

### **1. Title of the Practice**

Theoretical foundation of the discipline and documentation & exploration of endangered languages

### **2. Objectives of the Practice**

The linguistic documentation is an emerging trend of Linguistics in the tradition of Philology, Socio-Linguistics, Syntax and Language Technology etc. based on multidisciplinary approach consist of linguistics, anthropology, sociology, ecology and folklore etc. The main aim of the Centre is to facilitate the academics and society with preparing guideline for the study of marginal languages and cultures in order to its exploration and revitalization along with producing books, dictionaries, primer, digital content, video, language maps and various possible language technological resources. The background of this study is to undertake fieldwork, transcription, research, analysis, archiving and documentation of smaller indigenous or endangered languages.

### **3. The Context**

The education system has encouraged the growth of dominant languages more, and in practice most of the smaller languages are not included. This has resulted in marginalization of diverse linguistic communities and enhanced threat perceptions to their languages. To safeguard these languages, we also need to formulate clear cut plans for the empowerment of these languages and their speakers. This would involve linking languages with literacy and education, with technology and economic opportunities. But at the same time, attitude of society from many marginal languages are not positive toward marginal languages and cultures as they are promoting their upcoming generation through dominant languages. Along with this situation, practicing regional languages and cultures is acknowledged as backwardness in privileged society and therefore promotion of marginal linguistic practices are always discouraged. It is essential for government to secure linguistic rights of its citizen promised through Indian constitution through providing teaching-learning resources in marginal languages.

### **4. The Practice**

One must sensitize all those well-meaning scholars and activists about the kind of tensions involved in working on these areas. We engage ourselves in the documentation, protection and promotion of endangered languages and their culture, we must understand that there will always be agencies that would like to color our perception and blur our vision. This is because any advocacy in favor of diversity may cause immense harm to several agencies that may have a stake in continuance of only a few languages as the media of trade, commerce, tourism, education and entertainment. There is thus a constant tension between 'being' and 'becoming.' It can be explained how and why it is so. It is obvious that one is not only concerned with numerical strength (or weakness) of a speech group here, nor is this applicable for those societies that face some biological problem (even if it is triggered by their marital patterns and endogamous behavior) in terms of reproductivity. But even such societies that have a long list of membership can disappear after a while, if they decide to change their natural 'being' of bilinguality (or multi-linguality) to 'becoming' members of a

larger linguistic entity – for various reasons, ranging from higher education, better job prospects, or more social prestige. In a multi-cultural milieu, it is natural being bilingual. But in the process of becoming a bilingual, it is, as if, a large scale religious conversion at work, reminding the members of a smaller community of the limitation of its space (physical, cultural and social) and the opportunities it offers or cannot just because of their language tag.

- To organize workshops and seminars aimed towards promoting advanced research related to endangered languages.
- To train teachers and students from other departments/centres in Field Linguistics, Lexicography and in techniques for data management and documentation. Field Linguistics should constitute an indispensable part of the centre.
- To promote and foster various domains of endangered languages so as to ensure minority/endangered language communities in maintaining and preserving language vitality, including the development of orthographical resources like scripts, book of letters primers.

## 5. Evidence of Success

### 5.1 Publication

- A comprehensive guideline for field survey entitled "Languages & Cultures on the Margin: Guideline for Field Work on Endangered Languages" Timepass Publication, Bhubaneswar. ISBN- 978-93-87563-32-2.
- Translated & edited version of Guideline entitled 'अल्पसंख्यक भाषा एवं संस्कृति: भारतीय संकटग्रस्त भाषाई सर्वेक्षण हेतु निर्देशिका' (alpasankhyaka bhaashaa evam samskri'ti : bhaarateeya sankat'agrasta bhaashaaom ke sarvekshana hetu nirdeshikaa), The Marginalized Publication, Delhi. ISBN: 978-93-87441-29-3
- An edited English book entitled "Indian Languages and Cultures: A Debate" The Marginalized Publication, Delhi ISBN: 978-93-87441-31-6
- An edited Hindi book entitled "आकांक्षी भारतीय भाषा एवं संस्कृति: एक विमर्श (aakaankshee bhaarateeya bhaashaa evam samskri'ti : eka vimarsha)" The Marginalized Publication, Delhi ISBN: 978-93-87441-30-9.

### 5.2 Digital Products

- Developed data capturing android app.
- Preparing complete web-portal and android app for marginal languages and cultures.

### 5.3 Academic Events and Community Awareness Program

- Organized two national seminars, two training programs for the enumerators, ten fieldworks in different districts of West Bengal for Bhumij, Birhor, Dhimal, Kharia-Savar, Koda/Kora, Kurukh/Oraon, Mahali, Malpaharia, Rabha, Tamang, Toto and Turi languages and four workshops for lexicon development in Koda/Kora, Kurukh/Oraon languages. The awareness programs to sensitize the society and to aware the community people toward marginal linguistic issues were organized in the form of cultural events, painting/poster exhibitions and open discussions.

## 6. Problems Encountered and Resources Required

The socio-politics of minorities has always been a neglected area in the functioning systems of democracy. Taking this topic in academia is neither encouraging nor supportive from administration, society and other relevant stakeholders. Searching a linguistically competent speaker from marginal languages is itself a challenging task. Either they are shifting to dominant languages rapidly or losing their mother tongue competence due to hiding tendency of linguistic identity and minimum awareness toward languages and cultures. The question of empowerment is bigger than anything in the age of global competition and opportunities. Similarly, availability of basic resources in this field is biggest challenge as very less linguistic data from marginal languages are available for research and development. The first and last linguistic survey of India was done during more than one hundred year back. Further, after independence, Indian government rereleases data of mother tongue only, which has greater than 10000 populations and hence under threat population, naturally which have less than 10000 populations are gradually becoming more challenging in exploring its metadata.

## 7. Notes (Optional)

The aim of such type of studies has become highly relevant not only as per new slogan **Vocal for Local**, but also in view of National Education Policy 2020. Considering these themes, Centre is planning to introduce courses in Folkloristics, where regional and ethnic arts, literature, music, attires and medicines may be highlighted through teaching and researches. While a multifaceted portal and app development is already in process and may be released soon.

Any other information regarding Institutional Values and Best Practices which the university would like to include.