

Language Maintenance Among Garo Community Members in Bangladesh

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Abstract

For last few decades, there has been a growing interest in language contact research on different minority communities around the world. This study is an in-depth qualitative research on language maintenance among Garo community members in Bangladesh. Participants' language use and preference in different domains: home domain, friendship domain, religion domain and media domain were investigated through individual in-depth semi-structured interviews using the sociolinguistic questionnaire. Analyzing participants' language use and preference inside and outside the community, this study has provided a broad picture of language maintenance among Garo people and tried to seek out what factors and sectors are playing a significant role in maintaining the Mandi language and shift from Mandi to Bangla despite the pressure of national language Bangla. Finally, it can be said that the strong willingness of Garo community members to protect their language is helping them to keep alive their mother tongue despite having lots of pressure from Bangla and English language.

Key Words: Language Maintenance, Mandi language, Garo community, Domain Approach, Ethnic Community in Bangladesh

1. Introduction

Bangladesh is a multi-diverse country with 45 languages including one state language. Bangladesh has over fifty ethnic groups most of whom live in Rajshahi, Chittagong, Chittagong Hill Tracts, greater Mymensingh, Sylhet, Patuakhali, and Barguna (Islam & Miah, 2021). Borchgrevink and McNeish (2007) report an estimated ethnic community population of 2.5-3 million comprising 2% of the total population. Among them, the largest ethnic community group is Chakma, which consists of approximately 347,419 people, according to the 2001 census (World Bank, 2017).

All of them have their individual ethnic language which belongs to four main language families: Austro-Asiatic, Dravidian, Indo-European, and Sino-Tibetan. Languages such as Khasi, Koch, Mundari, Santali, and

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War-Jaintia belong to the Austro-Asiatic family, while Kurux and Sauria-Paharia are Dravidian languages that are mostly spoken by ethnic community groups living in the northern districts of Bangladesh. Indo-European languages such as Chakma and Tanchangya are spoken by the ethnic community groups bearing the same names in the Chittagong Hill Tracts and speakers of Bishnupriya are found in the north-western districts of Sylhet, Moulvibazar, Habiganj, and Sunamganj. There are also Sino-Tibetan languages like Marma, Bawm-Chin, Chak, Khumi-Chin, Koch, Pankhua, Tipperary, Mru, and Mizu spoken by ethnic communities who live in the Chittagong Hill Tracts; the Garo community speaks Garo in the Greater Mymensingh area; and Rakhine by the Rakhains in the south-western district Patuakhali (Lewis, 2009).

In Bangladesh, almost 98% of people speak Bangla as their first language, and 2% speak 44 ethnic languages (Cavallaro & Rahman, 2009, p.195; see also Sarker & Davey, 2009, p.3). Since independence, all state official communicative activities, language policy, and cultural development have followed the Bangla language disregarding multilingual makeup and hence marginalizing the ethnic community groups (Hossain & Tollefson, 2007; Mohsin, 2022). However, in 2009 the government decided to provide mother-tongue-based education to the child (Ministry of Education, 2010). The National Curriculum Textbook Board (NCTB) took the initiative to introduce textbooks in Chakma, Marma, Santal, Garo, Tripura, and Oraon languages.

The use of mother tongues of the ethnic community people at home varies from 80% to 100%, with speakers sometimes using another ethnic community language besides the mother tongue and Bangla. While the ethnic communities in the Chittagong Hill Tracts use their mother tongues to a great extent, in North Bengal most ethnic community people use their languages less than 60% of the time at home (Rafi, 2006). In a survey of Meitei speakers (Kim & Kim, 2008) in the Sylhet Division, 98% of speakers surveyed used their mother tongue at home and 97% with Meitei neighbours. Similar results have been found in surveys of Santali speakers (Ahmed et al., 2010), War-Jaintia speakers (Brightbill et al., 2007), and speakers of Bishnupriya (Kim & Kim, 2008).

2. Garo Community in Bangladesh

It was Tolemi who first mentioned the name Garo in 200 A.D. while collecting information from Patliputra. He recorded the Garo hills as

‘Umar puj’ and its inhabitants as Garoini. Playfair (1998) mentioned that the Gara or Ganching subtribe first received their appellation of ‘Gara’, and that name was extended to all the inhabitants of the hills and was finally changed from Gara to Garo. Das and Islam (2005) believe that there are two basic groups among the Garo, namely, ‘Lamdani’ or ‘Plain Garo’ and ‘Achick’ or Hill Garo.

In Bangladesh, Garos were first officially introduced in the Mymensingh district which resulted in the emergence of a notion of a separate Garo homeland in Bengal by the British administration (Bal, 2007). According to the Banglapedia (National Encyclopedia of Bangladesh), the antecedent home of Garo is located in the Xinjiang province, north-west of China. They left that place several thousand years ago and migrated to Tibet. Then they moved again to the north-eastern Indian Hill tracts and northern Bangladesh about 4500 years ago. And finally, they migrated to the greater Mymensingh area and established a small feudal kingdom there. In 1964 again Garos left Bangladesh because of the communal problem between Indian and Pakistani people (Bal, 2007). Since 1971, Garo people have been living in Bangladesh and now their presence is increasing gradually in Bangladesh.

In Bangladesh, the Garo population is nearly 150,000, and most of them follow the Christian religion (Islam, 2012). The Garo ethnic community is living in Mymensingh and the highest number of Garo of Mymensingh is noticeable in Haluaghat, Netrokona, Mymensing, and Modhupur. They also live in scattered ways in Sherpur, Tangail, and Jamalpur districts. They have eight dialects such as A’beng, A’tong, A’we, Chisak, Matchi, Dual, Ganching (also known as Gara), and Chibok (Burling, 2004). Though most of the Garo people of plain land speak A’beng, they understand other dialects as well. The Garo in Bangladesh call their language ‘Mandi khusik’ (Muhammed et al., 2011). They use the Roman alphabet as they do not have their own script. Burling (1963) and Burling (2004) assert that Mandi bears a substantial linguistic impact from the Bangla language, which is evident in the use of a large number of Bangla words and sentence structure. They prefer to call them Mandi, and they call each other Mandi, while mainstream society, foreigners, and writers prefer to call them Garo, and their language is called Garo language. For that reason, it is found that the Garo language and Garo people have been written in published articles and books (Burling, 1963). This study uses both the Garo language and Mandi as the language of the Garo community in Bangladesh.

3. Literature Review

This study is in-depth qualitative research on Garo language maintenance and attitudes. To date, no research has been conducted on language maintenance among the Garo community in Bangladesh, but the existing research on Garos focuses on their existence, rights, culture, family structure, marital system, eating style, religion, and origination.

Burling (1963) first wrote on the Garo people of greater Mymensingh, but his study was anthropological. In his studies, he mentioned only the history of the origin of the Garo language. Ellen Bal is a famous researcher on the Garo people; she wrote a book named *They Ask If We Eat Frogs*. In the first part, she mentions some ethnic community based discourses that were used in the post-colonial era, how other people named them Garo, frog eaters, primitive and islanders and also how Garo people define themselves in their opinion. In the second part, she describes the history and constitution of Garo boundaries, including internal and external. She also mentioned that the Garo consider themselves an ethnic community, belonging together based on a shared identity and culture. She also stated Garo's marriage system. In the third section, she described how ethnogenesis, the arrival of Christian missionaries, and then the introduction of Christianity influenced Garo's self-perception and group formation. Islam (2008) also focuses on the origin and history of Garo cultural characteristics, specifically Garo marriage rituals, due to the influence of the modern era. Furthermore, Muhammed et al. (2011) explored diverse socio-economic and cultural aspects of the Garo people in terms of their livelihoods. In the same way, there are some other studies conducted on the Garo community in Bangladesh that explore the psychosocial dimension of ethnicity (Das & Islam, 2005); marriage rituals (Islam, 2008); religious rituals and worldview (Khaleque, 1983); family structure and cultural patterns (Sattar & Jalil, 2002). Focusing on the structure of the Garo language, Burling (2003 & 2004) worked on the grammar and the lexicon of the Mandi language, while Kim et al. (2010) mentioned the linguistic variation within and among each of these six varieties of Mandi languages investigating attitudes of Mandi speakers towards their own varieties.

Garo communities have struggled to maintain their language and transmit the language to the next generation from the very early stage, but this particular issue has not been mentioned previously in any of the research papers. So, this research attempts to explore how and to what extent the

Garó language is maintained among Garó community members in Bangladesh. The research question guiding the exploration of the language maintenance experiences of Garó communities in Bangladesh is as follows:

How and to what extent do the ethnic Garó community members in Bangladesh maintain their language inside and outside of the Garó community? Why do they prefer such language use?

4. Theoretical Framework

Language maintenance is a significant issue if a country has many diverse languages. Without a strong desire and cultural roots, it is almost impossible to maintain an individual's first/ethnic language. According to Pauwels (2004), language maintenance denotes the continuing use of a language in the face of competition from regionally and socially more powerful languages. In contrast, language shift means the change of language use from the first language to another language due to the influence of the dominant language. Language maintenance pattern varies across the world as some minority languages are shifted to mainstream languages while some are maintained due to the strong willingness and ethnicity of the community members. As part of exploring the language maintenance of Garó community members in Bangladesh, this study focuses on the extent of language use in different domains using the theoretical framework of the Domain Approach.

In the 1980s, language maintenance research used Fishman's (1965) domain approach in investigating the patterns of language use in various domains. This approach asks, "Who *speaks what language to whom and when?*" with the aim of constructing an overall picture of language use in a community (Fishman, 1965, p. 67). Domain is an abstract concept that denotes "places" or "locations" as well as socio-cultural contexts. There is variation in the number of domains employed to discern language use patterns. For instance, Pütz (1991) mentioned family, friendship, church, clubs, and work; and Pauwels (2016) identified five domains, while Clyne (1991) examined eleven domains, including home/family, friends and neighbours, education, religion, secular community groups, work, work, transactional domain, ethnic press, radio, television and video, libraries. They all discovered that certain domains were more effective than others at maintaining language.

The objective of this research is to explore the extent of language use in the Garó community in Bangladesh in terms of "domains" of use. The

interview data demonstrates how and to what extent participants of this study use their ethnic language mostly in four domains: ‘family’, ‘friendship’, ‘religious’ and ‘media’. In the family domain, this study explores the ‘language use’ with parents, children, spouses, siblings, grandparents, relatives, and extended family members, while the friendship domain indicates the use of ethnic language in social networks, workplaces and children’s educational institutions. Language use of the informants of this study in the religious and media domain is also brought into consideration to explore the extent of language maintenance among the Garo community in Bangladesh.

5. Methodology

This study aims to examine language maintenance and the factors associated with it among Garo community members using in-depth qualitative research methods. This research has been conducted on two different places in Bangladesh: Haluaghat thana which is located near the Bengali mainstream community and Phulpur thana which is located near the Mandi stream community. This study involves participants from both types of places to explore the difference in their language situation and perception in terms of the concentration of Garo people. Clyne (1991) states that the concentration of ethnic communities in a particular area plays a vital role in maintaining the first language.

5.1 Participants

For the current research, around 19 Garo members from two different regions in the Mymensingh division are randomly chosen using the snowball technique. As the first researcher grew up in the research context, she initially knew some participants who later helped her to reach others. Before taking the interviews, participants were explained the aim and objectives of the research projects and then given the consent form to complete. They were assured that pseudonyms would be used as part of the privacy of their identity, and they could contact the researcher anytime to withdraw their names until the research project was submitted.

Of 19 participants, about ten are female and nine are male, with ages varying from twenty to ninety years old (see Appendix 1). Participants are divided into two age groups: age range 20-34 and age range 35-95 (see Appendix 1: Table A1). This is because 35 and above age group is significant due to the factors like career progression, lifestyle choices, family planning, and health concerns. Six females and three males are

from Phulpur Thana while six females and four males are from Haluaghat Thana under the Mymensing division (see Appendix 1: Table A2). Participants are also included from different professional groups to draw the exact picture of language maintenance and attitudes about language maintenance (see Appendix 1: Table A3).

5.2 Data Collection and Analysis

In the field of language maintenance and shift, the standard research tools are survey-based questionnaires (Clyne & Kipp, 1999; Pauwels, 1986; Putz, 1991) and semi-structured interviews (Chowdhury & Rojas-Lizana, 2021; Chowdhury, 2019). This study has used semi-structured interviews as the main tool for data collection to gather information about participants' language maintenance and perspectives towards Mandi language maintenance.

In the semi-structured interviews, the role of the interviewer was an active listener as participants were asked many follow-up questions based on each response, and they were also given space to ask the researcher about the research. It took seven days to collect data. Most of the interviews took nearly 20 minutes, and the first two took more than one hour. The interviews were audio-recorded after getting their permission while the interviewer took some notes during the interviews.

After that, data were transcribed and coded according to the themes and sub-themes of the research objectives, such as language use in the family domain, friendship domain, religious domain, media domain and the factors associated to such language use. Finally, thematic analysis is used in analysing and discussing the data.

6. Findings and Discussion

This section presents how and to what extent participants use language in different domains and why they prefer such language use. In this study, participants were asked to report their language use and preference in the interviews. Four domains were selected: family domain, friendship domain, religious domain, and media domain. This is because they are mostly used by this community members. For example, the official language in Bangladesh is Bangla and Garo community people are not able to speak in Garo at their work places. However, work and education domains are integrated into the discussion of friendship domain.

6.1 Family Domain

The existing research shows that family has the highest chance to use or maintain the language (Chowdhury & Sol, 2021; Clyne, 1991; Clyne & Kipp, 1999; Pauwels, 1986; Pütz, 1999). This study found that the Mandi language is used mostly in the family, and both generations use it frequently. In this study, family members listed in the interview questions were parents, spouses, children, siblings, grandparents, and extended family relatives. Parents and siblings were selected because they were family members who were likely to have frequent contact with participants. Grandparents were also selected because these family members were previously found to be promoting language maintenance. Relatives are selected because relatives visit and have a long conversation during any kind of traditional program. Regular gatherings of family members, including extended family members, are usual in Mandi families. The following sections present the findings of this research regarding participants' language use and preference in the family domain.

6.1.1 Language Use between Parents and Children

Almost all participants use the Mandi language with their parents, even those who do not talk about it outside because of their job and environment. They also use the Mandi language with their parents. They report,

³Example 1(M1): *I try to speak Mandi with my parents because they are not used to speak either in Bangla or in English. They will also not understand most of the Bangla word if we use them in our conversation.* (বাবা-মার সাথে কথা বলতে গেলে আমি চেষ্টা করি মান্দি দিয়ে বলতে। কারন বাবা-মারা তো বাংলা ইংরেজিতে অভ্যস্ত না। অনেক ওয়ার্ড তারা বলতে গেলে বুজবেনা।)

Example 2 (F6): *I use Mandi if I speak with children.* (বাচ্চাদের সাথে মান্দি দিয়েই কথা বলি।)

The above examples show that participants use Mandi with their parents because they do not understand Bangla language very well. Nevertheless, the second generation who are below 15 and stay with the Bengali mainstream community speak either in Bangla or English with their family members. Their mothers are trying to teach them the Mandi language. The school-going children are also learning Bangla language more than the Mandi language as they spend most of the time with

³ Interview data is presented here in translated form using serial of participants mentioned in the Appendix (Table A4). M stands for Male participants, while F stands for Female participants.

Bangla-speaking children, but their mothers take initiatives in retaining the use of Mandi by maintaining it at home. Given that their family follows the matriarchal social structure, the mother position is important while the role of father is not much visible for this study.

6.1.2 Language Use with Spouse

Around 15 participants speak with their spouse in Mandi except 4 participants where 3 males and 1 female; their age is above 35 and they are from higher educated class among the nineteen participants from two several villages (one village is close to the Bengali mainstream community and another village is close to the Mandi stream community).

Example 3 (M1): I try, but it gets mixed automatically with Bangla, Mandi, and English. (আমি চেষ্টা করি। মিশ্রিত হয়ে যায়। বাংলা মান্দি ইংরেজি।)

Example 4 (F2): I speak in Mandi and I can tell it proudly. (আমি মান্দি বলি এবং এটা আমি গর্ব করে বলতে পারি।)

Example 5 (F4): We use a mixed language, sometimes with words and/or sometimes with sentences. (Mixed with Bangla and English). মিশ্র হয়ে যায়। শব্দ মিশ্র হয়ে যায়।

The above examples show that F2 participant use Mandi properly while M1 and F4 participants use Mandi and Bangla mixed. The research findings show that participants aged below 35 and living close to the mainstream community speak Bangla and Mandi mixed with their spouses as they spend most of their time in the Bangla-speaking community.

6.1.3 Language Use with Siblings

All participants use Mandi language with their siblings. If children try to speak Bangla with their siblings as the school influences them, their mother consciously encourages their children not to speak Bangla with their siblings, but the situation is different when the parents are educated and live in a city. Their children speak Bangla or English with their siblings. The participants aged 35 or above speak Mandi with their siblings, while those aged below 35 have a low tendency to speak Mandi with their siblings.

6.1.4 Language Use with Grandparents

The findings of this study show that almost all interviewees speak the Mandi language with their grandparents because some said they do not understand Bangla very well. Mandi language maintenance is higher at

home with grandparents in this study. Hence the low Bangla proficiency of grandparents facilitates Mandi language maintenance in the family domain.

6.1.5 Language Use with Relatives and Extended Family Members

The findings of this study demonstrate that highly educated participants maintain their language in one way, and the people who are not literate or highly educated maintain their language differently. Around five highly educated participants speak both Mandi and Bangla even though they start with Mandi greetings and end conversations with Bangla. However, they try to speak Mandi with their relatives who are old in age and have no literacy because they do not understand Bangla very well. The report,

Example 6 (M1): I try to speak Mandi with our relatives. If I talk to them in Bangla, our older relatives may assume that I am speaking to them in Bangla although I am a Mandi. Again, there is a different attitude toward using language among educated people in terms of social class or level. They use Bangla, Mandi and English depending on the situation, mainly when they do not find the exact Mandi word for any terms in conversation. Also, they have different regional accents in using Bangla. For example, we use Mymensingh's regional dialect when talking to people who live in rural areas. However, we try to use the standard Bangla language correctly when talking to our community's highly educated people. However, we cannot avoid the local Mymensingh accent in our conversation.

আত্মীয়দের সাথে মান্দি দিয়ে বলার চেষ্টা করি। যারা আমার বয়োযুগ্ত তাদের সাথে যদি বাংলা দিয়ে বলি তারা আবার মনে করবে মান্দি হয়েছে বাংলা বলছে। আবার যারা শিক্ষিত সেখানে ক্লাস ওয়াইস লেভেল ওয়াইস তখন বাংলা, ইংরেজি, মান্দি সবটাই আসে। শিক্ষিতরা যেখানে সেখানে বাংলা আসতেছে ইংরেজি আসতেছে যখন মান্দি শব্দ মনে পড়ছেনা, মান্দি শব্দ নেই। আবার বাংলা বলাতেও পাথক্য আছে যদি গ্রামে বলি তাহলে বলি 'খাইছুন' 'যাইছুন' (হাহাহা)। এটা আমার মায়মিসিংহের ভাষা। আবার যখন শিক্ষিতদের সাথে কথা বলি তখন চেষ্টা করি শুদ্ধ করে বলার চেষ্টা করি যদিও মায়মিসিংহের টান একটাই চলে আসে।

The above example indicates that using Bangla with relatives might not be accepted positively in their communities. They think of it as part of disrespect when they are talking in another language with their relatives. They also recognise the influence of regional accents in using mainstream language in terms of education and socio-economic background.

The interview data show that extended family and relatives help them to maintain the Mandi language in their communities. They are playing a significant role in preserving Mandi by transmitting it to the next generations and creating a positive language environment in their family domain. This is also evident in family domain of the participants who are with higher socioeconomic backgrounds and live in both areas: Haluaghat Thana and Phulpur Thana.

6.1.6 Language Preference at Home

A high preference for using Mandi was found at home among people aged 35 or above. Different scenarios were also found when comparing home language preferences among the first-class or good corporate job holders. Most of the time, they use the Bangla language at home as they speak in Bangla for a long time in a day, which makes them use Bangla automatically at home. Bangla becomes their priority though they do not like it. On the contrary, the people who are local jobholders, teachers, and farmers prefer using Mandi at home. Again, it is found that people aged below 35 tend to prefer Bangla at home, and in their opinion, no one speaks Mandi here, and they have to spend the majority of the time with Bengali people, so they cannot speak Mandi though they want to speak. This may lead to a shift from their mother tongue to Bangla language. They have a strong connection with the Bangla language and mainstream community and show low value to bilingualism. These demotivate them to speak or maintain their Mandi language.

The result of this study shows that most of the participants and users use and prefer Mandi language at home. This result supports the findings of previous studies (Chowdhury, 2019; Chowdhury & Sol, 2021; Clyne, 1991) which found that the family domain is important to language maintenance because it has a high rate of community language use. This result supports Clyne's (1991) finding and illustrates grandparents' important role in language. This study also demonstrates the differences in language maintenance and shifts in terms of young and old generations. The use and maintenance of Mandi language were found to be higher for the people who are above 35; on the other hand, the people who are below 35 have low maintenance and preference to use Mandi language. However, the village near the big Mandi stream community still has a high preference to use Mandi compared to that village with the Bengali mainstream community. The participants who are living with the Bengali mainstream community have a high chance of losing their Mandi one day because their young generation knows Bangla better due to the influence of the mainstream Bangla language.

6.2 Friendship Domain

The friendship domain is examined in this study because a person's social network is found to correlate with their language preference and language ability (Wei, 1994). Participants' social network type, self-reported language use with friends, and language preference in this domain are investigated through interviews. They report,

Example 7 (M1) *Mandi, Bangla and English Mixed* (মান্দি, বাংলা, ইংরেজি মিক্সড।)

Example 8 (F2) *We use Mandi when we are talking with us (people of the same community), but we use Bangla with Bengali* আমরা আমরা হলে পরে মান্দি বলি তবে বাঙ্গালি হলে বাংলা বলি।

Example 9 (M3) *We start a conversation in Mandi, but Bangla comes incidentally or automatically (smile).* (মান্দি ভাষায় কথা বলি তবে প্রসঙ্গক্রমে চলে আসে বাংলা)।

The above examples show that participants of this study use Mandi, Bangla and English in their social domain depending on the language of the interlocutors. It is also noticeable in the data that Bangla comes into their conversation automatically, even when they are using Mandi in their family or social domain. It indicates the influence of the dominant language in the daily use of Mandi.

This study focuses on the participants' social networks as the data is collected from two villages: one is near to Bengali mainstream community, and another one is a non-Bengali mainstream community. When they are asked to talk about their language use in their workplace, they report,

Example 10 (M1) *My working place is in Russia so there is no Mandi. I speak either English or Bengali. We are the only one Mandi family over there.* আমার কর্মস্থল মস্কোতে সেখানে মান্দি আছে এমন প্রশ্নই আসে না। ইংরেজি বা বাংলায় কথা বলি। আমরাই একটাই মান্দি পরিবার সেখানে।

Example 11 (F3) *I taught at school and there I spoke Bangla.* বিরুধাকুনি স্কুলে পড়াতাম। সেখানেই বাংলায় বলতাম। স্কুলের কাজ করতাম।

Example 12 (M4) *I use mixed language, but I prefer Bangla.* মান্দি বাঙালি মিক্সড সবাই। বাংলা মান্দি দুইটাই বলা হয়। তবে বাংলা হয় বেশি।

Example 13(F5) *I speak Bangla.* বাংলায় বলি। (উনি সিস্টার একটি খ্রিস্টান হোস্টেলের দায়িত্বে আছেন)।

The above examples demonstrate that the participants use Bangla in their workplace. The interview data also describe that people who live near the Bengali mainstream community have a strong social network with both Bengali and Mandi communities. In contrast, the people who live in larger Mandi communities have a robust social network only with the members of the Mandi community. The informants of this study report that they are highly connected to Mandi community, even if they live in urban areas or overseas for job purposes. It is also noticeable here that the young generation is more involved in the community than the old generation when they live close to the Mandi concentrated areas. Mandi people love to stay with their community members, although it is always impossible due to their job purpose. For this study, only a first-class job holder participant is not involved with Mandi community but is heavily involved with the Bengali community.

Findings of this study show that the extent of using Mandi language in the social or friendship domain is not as high as in the family domain. Some participants aged above 35 live in their local area and do the job in the same place or farming, teaching, and so on. They speak Mandi entirely with their Mandi co-workers. Participants who do the job in capital or other different places across the country, their situation is like highly educated people who speak Bangla or English with their colleagues. If they have a Mandi colleague, they speak Mandi or if they talk with Mandi friends, they use Mandi language. However, it is interesting to mention here that the highly educated Mandi people greet one another in Mandi at their workplace, but they continue the rest of their conversation in Bangla. It is because they respect workplace communication norms where the dominant language or lingua Franca should be used.

This study further shows that participants who are aged below 35 spend their time with Mandi friends and communicate in Mandi if they live close to the Mandi concentrated areas, but they do not have difficulty in socialising with Bengali friends as almost all of them are bilingual. In contrast, participants who live adjacent to the Bengali mainstream community state that no one speaks Mandi in the social domain, and Mandi is losing their day by day. They further add that they need Bangla or English to get better jobs for their future career, so they speak Bangla with their Mandi friend.

It is also found that Mandi people love to live with each other, but as they are in Bangladesh, and everything is in Bangla language, they need to

interact mostly in Bangla language in their socialisation. As their children go to mainstream schools where the medium of instruction is Bangla, they have to use Bangla throughout the entire school time, eventually making them fluent in Bangla rather than Mandi. They also develop their socialisation with Bengali children, so their social network is filled with Bengali people. Some parents, however, make them conscious of using Mandi while some have accepted the language shift to Bangla as usual when they see that there is no opportunity to practice Mandi in the social domain.

To conclude, studying the various patterns of language choice and preference demonstrated in the friendship domain shows that this domain also has a vital role in maintaining the Mandi language but not as much as the family domain. However this finding is very prominent in the Mandi concentrated areas. Language use in this domain proves the community support and willingness of the participants to retain their ethnic language despite the influence of mainstream language.

6.3 Religious Domain

Religious domain is not found as a significant domain to maintain Mandi language because Mandi language is used neither in their religious institution nor their religious practices. All informants of this study are Christian and go to church for prayers, but the church uses Bangla as it is open to all. In replying to the question of using language in the religious domain, they report,

Example 14 (F3) *We often speak in Mandi, but we use Bangla most of the times. We perform prayers at home or in the church or in villages, but we use Bangla (because) the Bible is translated in Bangla. For example: don't you see the Bangla translation of the Quran? We have all studied in Bangla medium. We use Mandi in our own way, but we use Bangla in performing our religious rituals and prayers.* মাঝে মাঝে মান্দি ভাষাতে হয় তবে বেশির ভাগ বাংলাতেই হয়। বাসায়ও হয় আবার গির্জা বা গ্রামে হয়। সেটা বাংলাতে হয়। (কেন হয়) যেহেতু বাইবেল আমাদের বাংলায় অনুদিত কুরান যেমন বাংলায় অনুদিত আছেন, আমরা সবাই বাংলাতেই পড়ালেখা করছি। আমরা আমাদের ভাষাটা আমাদের মত নিজস্বভাবে বলি কিন্তু আমাদের এমন ধর্মীয় প্রার্থনা বাংলায় বলি।

Example 15 (M 4) *We do prayers at our home and also in church, but we pray in Bangla. [Why in Bangla? Why not in Mandi?]. Due to the lack of practice in Mandi, Bangla seems to be more significant in our prayers (haha..smile). Besides, we can't speak in*

Mandi fluently due to the lack of practice in Mandi for a long period of time. We feel shy and hesitate and so we use Bangla much in our prayers. বাসায়ও করি গির্জাতেও করি। তবে বাংলাতেই করি। (বাংলা কেন মান্দি না কেন?) চর্চা না থাকার কারণে তবে বাংলাতে গুরুত্ব মনে হয় বেশি (হাহাহ)। চর্চা না থাকার কারণে অই ভাবে আসেনা। জড়তা কাজ করে যেহেতু আমাদের বাংলায় করা হয় বেশি সেটার কারণে।

Example 16 (F 5) *In church I use Bangla in conducting prayers. We continue our prayers in Bangla because we do not get any book in Mandi from the missionary, but we do some prayers every evening at home when we prefer to use Mandi.* আমি চার্চে প্রার্থনা করাই। বাংলাই চালায় কেননা মিশন থেকে আমাদের কোন বই দেয় নাই তাই বলে বাংলাতেই চালিয়ে যাচ্ছি। কিন্তু প্রত্যেকদিন সন্ধ্যাবেলা অল্প সময় ধর্মচর্চা করে থাকি আমরা, সেটি আবার মান্দি ভাষাই করি।

Example 17 (F6) *We speak in Bangla? (But why?) It is because it (prayers) happens usually through Bangla. As Mandi people live in the hostel, we organise prayers and other rituals in Mandi twice a week: Wednesday and Friday. Mandi is used on those two days.* বাংলা বলি (কেন?) সাধারণত বাংলায় হয়। এখানে (হোস্টলে) মান্দিরা আছে তাই সপ্তাহে দুইদিন (বুধবার ও শুক্রবার) মান্দিতে করা হয়।

The above examples show that Bangla is mostly used in their religious domain. It is also interesting to note here that they cannot feel spiritual if they do their prayer in Mandi language. The main reason is that the Mandi language is oral, and they use the Roman alphabet to write their language as they do not have a written form. Their religious script is written in Achik language, the language of Mandi who live in Assam, Garo hill tracks area in India. The Mandi people of Bangladesh cannot speak Achik; they speak Abeng, so they use Bengali script for their religious purposes. As most of them are now Christian, they have translated the Bible into Bangla with the help of Christians. However, some aged people still follow the traditional religion Sangsarek, and they follow their traditional religion through their Mandi language. Every Sunday, they spend their evening time performing religious activities, and they do it through their language, Mandi.

To conclude, the maintenance of the Mandi language in the religious domain is very limited compared to the family domain and friendship domain. It can, therefore, be said that Mandi might be lost from the religious domain if it is not adequately maintained in religious

institutions and churches. However, some families are taking individual initiatives to organise religious programs and rituals in Mandi at their home every Sunday, which day is only a great day to maintain the Mandi language in the religious domain. This also proves the willingness of participants to preserve their language by using it in religious practices.

6.4 Media Domain

Media is an important domain in maintaining a language. Clyne and Kipp (1999) state that media consumption significantly correlates with the second generation's community language proficiency level. In the case of the Garo language, they do not have rich audio, video documents, or other sources among the first generation. On the contrary, younger generations are more interested in making audio and video content using their languages, such as songs, dance, and documentaries. Findings of this research show that Garo people do not have national or private podcasting media, movies, or drama based on their language and people. However, sometimes Mandi language songs and dances are broadcasted on Bangladesh national TV show. On Indigenous Day some cultural programs have been telecasted on BTV. Otherwise, they do not have media. It can be print media or soft media. Participants of this study argued that nowadays, some young generation aged below 35 are using social media like YouTube and Facebook and developing cultural groups based on Mandi language and culture to save their culture and language from extinction. This also proves the awareness of the preservation of ethnic language among younger generations through the development of media and technology in the globalized world.

Garo people have a literacy rate of 90%, but it is based on the Bengali education system. Almost all Garo can speak Bangla and write their name in the Bangla language. On the contrary, they can only speak and understand their Mandi language. Only one female interviewee aged above 35 said she could read and write Mandi, while other participants informed that they could not read and write Mandi and also there were no resources to read and write Mandi. No more novel column writers are found based on Mandi language. In this domain, the maintenance of Mandi is not satisfactory because everyone wants to improve their Bangla language skills to get a job and other opportunities. However, there is a ray of hope to increase the literacy rate of Garo people in their ethnic language due to the initiatives of the Bangladesh Government to teach Garo children in their mother tongue in the pre-primary and primary schools from class 1 to 3.

7. Conclusion

This study contributes to the existing research on language maintenance, providing an overall picture of Mandi language maintenance, and tries to seek what domains are playing a significant role in maintaining the Mandi language despite the dominance of the national language Bangla and which accelerates the shift from Mandi to Bangla. By analysing participants' language use and preferences inside and outside the family, this study has attempted to represent their motivations for using Mandi in spite of having no significant social and national value. This study shows that the family domain is important to maintain the language. Mandi language usage is the first choice and preference of the people aged below and above 35 and who live in the Mandi community near the Mandi stream community or the Bengali stream community; they also prefer the Mandi language at home. It has been found that parents in the Garo language have more positive attitudes, for which reason their children still speak in the Garo language with their parents, seniors, and relatives. Some parents strictly maintain their child's language at home while others are pensive or passive about it. Garo people living in ethnic-based Garo villages or living away from them are facing language maintenance problems. The young generation and educated guardians start emphasizing Bangla and the English language to enjoy a better life and opportunities. Young generations of the Garo family who are living near the Bengali stream community have a propensity to shift to Bangla because they prefer Bangla to Mandi in their daily social interaction. On the other hand, Garo people with a big Mandi stream community still have an excellent chance to use Mandi in their environment, and the family domain is the best domain to use Mandi at home. The older generations keep trying to maintain their language, but sometimes it seems unsuccessful. Awareness of maintaining the mother tongue should be encouraged throughout the community by the stakeholders and elderly community members, which should be started very shortly before its complete shift to the dominant language. Finally, there is a need for future research to address the perception and experiences of second-generation Garo community people toward their language maintenance, as the data in this study was limited to parents' self-reports. Future further research should be conducted on Mandi language from a broader perspective, including different generations and villages where they live. Although this study's sample size (19 interviews) could be considered a

small number in terms of its representation of the Garo community in Bangladesh, this in-depth qualitative inquiry into their experiences will broaden the understanding of Mandi language maintenance that would be ignored in large-scale studies.

This study has widened our understanding of the preservation of language use and transmission of the language to future generations among the Garo community members in Bangladesh. The concentration of Garo speakers is a major factor in their language maintenance, whereas the majority of Garo people living in areas close to the mainstream community has poor language maintenance. The research indicates that language maintenance is strongly maintained by those over 35, whereas younger generations lack motivation to use the Mandi language, indicating that age is a significant factor in Garo language maintenance. In many households, the mother is also shown to have a major influence in the usage of Mandi. In summary, the high density of ethnic community members in a given area serves as a driving force for language maintenance within that community, whereas the official use of Bangla in all sectors of Bangladesh has restricted the use of Garo in public settings such as work, education, shopping, media, and so forth. It is also clear that support from their families and communities has greatly improved their ability to maintain their language, but the language has shifted to some extent in the religious and media domains. However, it is a matter of hope that following the commitment of policies, strategies and declarations of SDG 4, the Government of Bangladesh has started initial works of implementation of a plan to introduce mother tongue-based multilingual education (MTB-MLE) to ensure equal participation of the children from different ethnic, cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds. Since 2017, the Bangladesh Government have published books in five languages: Chakma, Marma, Tripura, Garo and Sadri languages, for pre-primary and primary school (class 1 to 3). One of the key recommendations of the policy is to provide all children with pre-primary education (PPE) and to expand compulsory education to grade 8 in the next decade. It can, therefore, be believed that state language policy and education in the mother tongue at the primary level will accelerate the Garo language maintenance by creating a positive language learning environment from the early stages of their school life. Participants of this study are hopeful about the sustenance of the Garo language due to the initiatives of the government through National Language Policies 2010.

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Appendix 1: Details of Participants

Table A1: Details of participants based on Age

| Age Group | Male | Female | Total |
|-----------|------|--------|-------|
| 20-35 | 3 | 2 | 5 |
| 35-95 | 4 | 10 | 14 |

Table A2: Details of participants based on place

| Respondents of all ages | Haluaghat Thana | Phulpur Thana | Total |
|-------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-------|
| Both male and female | N= 9 (F=6, M=3) | N=10 (F=6, M=6) | 19 |

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Table A3: Details of participants based on professions

| Profession | Male | Female | Total |
|------------------------------------|------|--------|-------|
| Teacher (Primary) | 0 | 2 | 2 |
| Private job (NGO) | 2 | 0 | 2 |
| Deputy Commissioner | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Electrician | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Retired | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Sister | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| PA | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Housewife | 0 | 3 | 3 |
| Un-employee | 2 | 0 | 2 |
| Student | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| Other (Farmers and unable to work) | 1 | 2 | 3 |

Table A4: Details of participants

| Sr. no. | Gender | Age group | Profession | Religion | Location |
|---------|--------|-----------|---------------------|-----------|-----------|
| 1. | M | 60-65 | Deputy Commissioner | Christian | Haluaghat |
| 2. | F | 50-55 | Teacher | Christian | Phulpur |
| 3. | F | 65-70 | Teacher | Christian | Phulpur |
| 4. | M | 65-70 | NGO employee | Christian | Phulpur |
| 5. | M | 60-65 | Managing Director | Christian | Hauaghat |
| 6. | M | 55-60 | Electrician | Christian | Phulpur |
| 7. | F | 45-50 | Personal Assistant | Christian | Haluaghat |
| 8. | F | 30-35 | Sister | Christian | Haluaghat |
| 9. | M | 70-75 | Retired | Christian | Phulpur |
| 10. | F | 30-35 | Housewife | Christian | Phulpur |
| 11. | F | 30-35 | Housewife | Christian | Phulpur |
| 12. | F | 30-35 | Housewife | Christian | Phulpur |
| 13. | M | 30-35 | Unemployee | Christian | Phulpur |
| 14. | M | 20-25 | Student | Christian | Phulpur |
| 15. | F | 20-25 | Student | Christian | Haluaghat |
| 16. | M | 70-75 | Farmer | Christian | Phulpur |
| 17. | M | 70-75 | Farmer | Christian | Phulpur |
| 18. | F | 70-75 | Farmer | Christian | Phulpur |
| 19. | F | 75-80 | Retired | Christian | Phulpur |