

Linguistic Area:

Some terminologies that must be explained

Linguistic Area:

Language diffusion:

Focal, Relic and Transitional areas :

Language change

Language shift

Language maintenance

Language loyalty

Language loss

Language revitalization

Language standardization:

Linguistic Area

Linguistic Area: Any geographical area that has relevant distribution of languages with regard to the structural dependencies can qualify as a linguistic area.

Thus, we may have areas like 'South India as a linguistic area', 'Hindi-speaking belt' as a linguistic area', 'Tibeto-Burman as a linguistic area', 'Austro-Asiatic belt' as a linguistic area' etc.

Nevertheless, we may have 'Sri Lanka' as a linguistic area', 'Bhutan as a linguistic area', 'Afghanistan as a linguistic area', 'Andaman and Nicobar as linguistic areas' etc.

Moreover, we can also think of 'Bihar/Jharkhand as a linguistic area', 'Maharashtra as a linguistic area' etc.

Last but not the least, we may also have 'JNU as a linguistic area', 'Dharchula as a linguistic area' and finally, 'Angika speaking-belt' as a linguistic area etc...

What does it mean by 'linguistic area'?

- A linguistic area— also known as a sprachbund ("federation of languages"), is an area of linguistic convergence, language diffusion or language crossroad where a group of languages that have some common features which may result from geographical proximity and language contact.
- Such area may have languages that can be genetically unrelated, or only distantly related and form a linguistic area.
- However, it must be kept in mind that wherever the genetic affiliations are unclear the sprachbund characteristics might give a false appearance of relatedness.
- Areal features are common features of a group of languages in a sprachbund.

- Federation is often multiethnic and it covers a large area of territory (such as Russia, the United States, India, or Brazil).
- In such linguistic area, the initial process of coming together and interactions create stability that may encourage other common interests, and reduce differences between the territories, and give them some more common ground to be together.
- It has been seen that in some cases such facts are recognized by the people of different locations and a movement is organized to merge languages that are more closely related.
- At other times, especially when common cultural factors are at play such as ethnicity and language, some of the steps in this pattern are accelerated so that languages can be brought nearer and closer to form a linguistic area, China is a very good example of this process.

Language diffusion

Languages are seen as an important part of our culture, yet many of the languages used in the world today are undergoing changes due to the increasing globalization of the world.

UNESCO estimates that at the end of the 21st century, 90 percent of today's languages will have been replaced by a few dominant languages.

This change where people give up the use of one language in favour of another is called language shift.

To find out why language shift happens and why some languages are being used less and less, one needs to first understand the dynamics behind language shift.

Language shift can be described as a diffusion process in accordance with physical diffusion—as spread of the dominant language and resulting retreat of the minority language.

Language diffusion:

Language diffusion can unfold a process in which there is movement of speakers from an area of high concentration to an area of lower concentration.

In India, we can visualize many commercial cities where people from different parts of the country would come and gradually make this diffusion process possible.

Kolkata, Assam, Goa, Delhi, Mumbai, Hyderabad etc. all these places can be exemplify as an area of language diffusion.

One of the key roles that such diffusion plays is the issue of language submersion.

In case of such language submersion, the languages from marginalized section get almost wiped out and one of the dominant languages eat out many small ones in the long run.

Focal, Relic and Transitional areas

Dialectologists often distinguish amongst focal area, relic area and transitional areas.

Focal area is an area which provides sources of numerous important innovations in the lexicon and even in the structure of the language and it usually coincides with centers of lively economic or cultural activities.

Relic area on the other hand is a place toward which such innovations may have started and are gradually spreading but have not arrived yet completely, or it may have moved out from this area.

Relic areas or relic phenomena are particularly common in out-of-the-way regional pockets or along the periphery of a particular language's geographic territory which is either potential for focal area or it was a focal area but has lost its charm and thus became relic.

Role of language in these areas has always been an interesting phenomenon to study.

The borders of regional dialects often pertain to the transitional area that share some features with one neighbour and some with the other neighbours such as Bhallawari bhasha.

Such mixtures result from unique diffusion of innovations in the lexicon and structure of the language from both sides.

This kind of diffusion in mixed dialects in any region may also be a consequence of mixed population that is created by migrations.

In regions with many bi-/multi-/lingual speakers, dialects of both languages will often undergo changes which have been influenced by the each other's tongue.

The interesting aspect of such transitional area is that in some cases, languages of such region show more than one option of a linguistic feature.

This entails that the speakers have not yet decided as to which one they should retain and which one they should discard!!

Language change

Language change is a big/huge topic in Sociolinguistics and it may not be possible to discuss the topic in great length here.

However, in SALA, we will touch upon the important aspects of language change that may be caused due to 'areal factors'.

Areal linguistics is the term which deals with the features of human languages that are shared by languages or dialects(varieties) in a geographic area, particularly when the languages are not descended from a common ancestor language.

The term 'areal factors' lays out the conditions and reasons for such sharing of the linguistic features of languages in that geographical area.

The distribution of regional language features may be viewed as the result of language change through geographical space over time.

A change is initiated at one given point in time and spreads outward from that point in progressive stages so that earlier changes reach the outlying areas later.

This model of language change is referred to as the wave model in sociolinguistics.

Language shift:

Language shift is the process by which a speech community in a contact situation (i.e. consisting of bilingual speakers) gradually stops using one of its two languages in favor of the other.

The usual factors of language-shift are generally considered to be social, and researchers have focused on speakers' attitudes (both explicit and unstated) toward a language and domains of language use in the community, as well as other macro social factors.

Additional research has focused on the effects of language shift, generally on the (changing) structure of the language itself.

In course of various kinds of discussion in SALA, we will have examples of Bhallaavar region where speakers have shifted to different forms of speech.

One of these forms is closely associated with Marathi, however, other one is related to Kannada.

Another instance where language shift may take place is when the speakers of young generation stop using the indigenous language of the area. Dharchula in Uttrakhand is a great example of the phenomenon.

The old people keep complaining that the young speakers (08 to 28 years) have no interest in conversing in their own mother tongue and this has brought shame to them.

There may be many social, economical and political reasons for such language shift.

One of the instances that one can present here is the case of Bhajjika, Khortha and Thethi compared to Maithili, Magahi and Bhojpuri.

Language maintenance

Our comparison of Bhajjika, Khortha and Thethi with Maithili, Magahi and Bhojpuri is useful to highlight the issue of language maintenance.

Maithili became one of the 22 Scheduled languages of India in 2004 which is known as 8th Scheduled languages of Indian constitution.

Bhojpuri is more widespread and has more speakers than Maithili but Maithili succeeded in securing such prestigious place in the constitution because of the factor of language maintenance.

It is interesting to note that every Maithili speaker, in India or abroad, imparts the basic knowledge of Maithili to his/her kid(s) without any exception.

This is phenomenal in terms of language maintenance and this is one of the reasons that has brought the fortune to Maithili in securing such prestige.

We may find similar instances with Bhojpuri and Magahi, but it is so easy to find exceptions to it.

Nevertheless, if we turn our focus to Bajjika, Khortha, Angika, Thethi etc., it is really surprising and even shocking that only one out of thousand, we will find a speaker of these languages who would like to teach his/her child his/her native language.

This phenomenon relates the topic to 'Language Loyalty'. In its most simplified sense, language loyalty is directly related language attitude of the speaker.

The speakers of many languages in India and elsewhere don't find any great motivation for imparting the knowledge of the native language to their kid(s).

One of the obvious reasons could be that they don't see any direct benefit (economic, political, educational) to impart the knowledge of the native language to their kid(s).

Language loss

This kind of situation and the attitude of the speakers of different languages create the context of language loss in general.

There can be a question asked at this point as to if this is the case why aren't languages such as Kortha, Thethi, Bajjika dying !!!

If we are very careful and carry out some field-survey and collect information about the process of passing on these languages from one generation to another generation, we would come to the findings that these languages are gradually losing their populations over generations.

There are many languages in India and elsewhere which are getting lost everyday and there are lots of organizations such as SOAS, Living languages, Himalayan languages project which are working towards the language revival.

Language revival/ revitalization

There are some instances in the history of human languages when a language that is almost vanished/disappeared from the area was revived/revitalized with the help of 8 different factors.

It is difficult to discuss all the 8 factors here, however, some of them can be as follows:

- making the conscious effort by the elderly speakers to reinforce the language in their lives
- invite the NGOs who are specializes in language revitalization/documentation
- take the help of linguists in order to compile the primers and basic phrase books that can come handy to revive the language
- start some social/political movements to draw the attention of the natives to re-assert their honour and prestige in the language and its usage!!

Language standardization

- The term 'standardization' referring to a process was originally associated with the business world. Uniformity, efficiency and comparability are the factors associated with this process.
- In business management, the processes of establishing standards of units of measures by means of quality, quantity, value, performance, etc. are discussed.

Comparably, the process of language standardization would depend on certain factors such as;

1. (Norm) Selection
2. Codification
3. Implementation and
4. Elaboration

"Standardization is nothing but raising or elevating the standard of a language or language variety or certain type of usages of a language in such a way that it could be effectively used in modern communication system.

A continuum of language change

yəhǎ	kəhǎ	jɛ/jɑYɪ	c ^h ət ^h ɪh
<u>you-hon</u>	where	go- <u>hon</u>	be-pres-imp- <u>hon</u>
‘Where are you going’?			

tɔ̃hě	kəhěwǎ	jɛ/jɑYɪ	c ^h ɔh
<u>you-hon</u>	where	go- <u>hon</u>	be-pres-imp- <u>hon</u>
‘Where are you going’?			

tɔ̃hě	kəhǎ	jɛ/jɑYɪ	c ^h ɔh
<u>you-hon</u>	where	go- <u>hon</u>	be-pres-imp- <u>hon</u>
‘Where are you going’?			

tɔ̃	kəhǎ	jɛ	c ^h ɔh
<u>you-hon</u>	where	go- <u>hon</u>	be-pres-imp- <u>hon</u>
‘Where are you going’?			

tɔ̃	kəhǎ	jɛ	c ^h i-h-i
<u>you-hon</u>	where	go- <u>hon</u>	be-pres-imp- <u>L.hon</u>
‘Where are you going’?			

tɔ̃	kəhǎ	jɛ	c ^h ɪ
<u>you-hon</u>	where	go- <u>hon</u>	be-pres-imp- <u>N.hon</u>
‘Where are you going’?			