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Assessing the Factors of Language Shift: A Study on the Rakhain Community in Kuakata and Cox's Bazar

ABSTRACT

Language shift is a common phenomenon in bilingual and multilingual communities. Bangladesh is a country with different ethnolinguistic communities. There are 45 or more indigenous groups forming linguistic minorities in Bangladesh, and they are ethno-linguistically different from the majority Bengali community. The Rakhain community is one of the minority communities in Bangladesh experiencing a language shift situation. The study was designed to assess the influence of demographic, socio-economic, and educational factors on the Rakhine language shift into Bengali in the context of Kuakata and Cox's Bazar. The study's objectives were to identify demographic, socio-economic, and educational factors of Rakhain language shift and assess the extent of influence of these factors on Rakhain language shift. A structured survey questionnaire was used to collect primary data from 120 respondents of the Rakhain community in Kuakata and Cox's Bazar. A stratified random sampling technique was used to collect the data. The data generated from the questionnaire survey were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20. The study's findings indicated a significant influence of demographic, socio-economic, and educational factors on the Rakhine language shift.

Keywords: Language shift; Rakhain language; Demographic factors; Socio-economic factors; Educational factors; Kuakata and Cox's Bazar

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1. Introduction

1.1 Language Shift

Language shift has been an essential research topic in bilingual and multilingual communities where a group progressively abandons its language of origin and adopts the language of the socially or economically dominant group (Fishma, 1971; Baker and Jones, 1998). 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 (Ravindranath, 2009). Fishman (1972) points out different ‘domains’ or language contact situations like home, academic institutes, and marketplace that can expedite or retard the language shift of a speech community. Knooihuizen (2006) considers language shift as a changing pattern of language use in different contact situations where the speakers of an ethnolinguistic community experience a new socio-cultural process. In another study, Fasold (1984) observes that when the speakers of a minority community collectively begin to choose the language of a dominant community, a language shift begins to occur. Appel and Muysken (1987) similarly report that minority language speakers in a bilingual context adopt the majority language for their upward social mobility and economic success.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The sociolinguistic history of the Rakhain community reveals that when they first made their landfalls in Kuakata and Cox’s Bazar, they were primarily monolinguals in their own ethnic (Rakhain) language. However, throughout the years, when the eminence of these tourist sites exponentially increased, and Bengali was established as a powerful medium of language operating social and economic discourses, a problem emerged in transforming the linguistic habits of the Rakhine community. Nowadays, most of the young members of the Rakhain community need to be more fluent in their language in different language contact situations. The Bengali language has dominated the domains of their language contact situations. Though the first generation (grandparents) is aware of the shift of the Rakhain language, they need to be able to maintain it. Besides, the second generation (son/daughter of the grandparents; and parents of the young generation) cannot use the Rakhain language with the Bengali community in different language contact situations. In addition, the young generation (son/daughter of the second generation; and grandchild of the first generation) of the Rakhain are not encouraged to use the Rakhain language in several domains of everyday life. Because of the issues above, Rakhine language users are shifting to Bengali. If this process continues, the linguistic heritage of the Rakhain community will suffer the fate of extinction in Bangladesh.

1.3 Rationale of the Study

Many studies (Mugaddam, 2022; Holmes, 2013; Hudyma, 2012; Namei, 2008; Baker, 2011; Khooihuizen, 2006; Matiki, 1996-97; Pendakur, 1990; Fishman, 1989) have been conducted to show the influence of different factors on minority language shift in foreign contexts. However, in Bangladesh, few studies (Afreen, 2020; Rahman, 2019; Huq, 2017; Afreen, 2013; Sultana, 2011) have been conducted, and those studies did not identify and explicate different demographic, socio-economic and educational factors together to evaluate ethnic minority language shift. The current study has bridged those gaps by identifying and analyzing demographic, socio-economic, and educational factors of the Rakhine language shift in Kuakata and Cox's Bazar.

1.4 Objectives of the Study

The specific objectives of the study are:

- I. To identify the demographic, socio-economic, and educational factors of the Rakhain language shift in Kuakata and Cox's Bazar
- II. To assess the extent of the influence of those factors on the Rakhine language shift in Kuakata and Cox's Bazar

1.5 Research Questions

The questions of the current study are:

- I. What demographic, socio-economic, and educational factors influence the Rakhain language shift in Kuakata and Cox's Bazar?
- II. To what extent do these factors influence the Rakhain language shift in Kuakata and Cox's Bazar?

2. Literature Review

The factors leading to the abandonment of minority languages are of different types and are usually interrelated (Baker and Jones, 1998; Crystal, 2004; De Klerk, 2000). Giles et al. (1977) consider demographic, socio-economic, and institutional factors as the influential factors that affect the shift of a minority language. Edwards (2010) similarly considers demography, education, and socio-economic situations as the critical factors of language shift. Pendakur (1990) refers to a linguistic group's social and demographic attributes that can affect a language to be maintained or shifted into another language. He identifies several demographic factors, such as age, gender, and inter-ethnic marriage, that can influence the degree and rate of language shift in a minority community.

'Age level' of the minority language speakers is one of the demographic factors of language shift. Different age levels shift at different

rates. Grenier (1984) finds that more shifts occur during the young adult age level, and few shifts occur during the children age level. Hudyma (2012) similarly finds that children seem to have lower shift rates, whereas those older than thirty-five tend to retain minority language. Pendakur (1990) argues that the maintenance or shift of a minority language depends on how well it is passed on to the children and accepted by the young adults of that particular linguistic group. 'Gender identity' of the language users is another demographic factor of language shift. Grenier (1984) argues that females are more conservative than males in experiencing language shift situations. However, Williamson and Eerde (1980) observe that men are more oriented toward the minority language while females shift faster to the majority language. Smith-Hefner (2003) similarly finds that young Javanese women lead the shift toward using Indonesian while men prefer retaining the traditional Javanese language. 'Marriage pattern' is the other demographic factor of language shift. Many studies (Mugaddam, 2022; Holmes, 2013; Baker, 2011; Pendakur, 1990) discover marriage patterns as an influential demographic factor of language shift. It is reported as the most crucial factor in the English language shifts into French on the border of Québec and Ontario (Pendakur, 1990). In the Australian immigrant context, language shift is considerably higher among the descendants of inter-ethnic (exogamous) couples (Clyne, 2003). Name (2012) likewise considers inter-ethnic marriage (exogamy) as an essential factor in the language shift of a minority community where the language of socially higher status becomes the preferred language of that minority community for their daily communication.

Many studies (Appel and Muysken, 1987; Mufwene, 2001; Brenzinger, 2006; Kandler et al., 2010; Huq, 2017; Afreen, 2020) show that language shift of a minority community is closely associated with different socio-economic factors where the shift of the native language to the majority language is perceived as getting good jobs or access to better social mobility and economic prospects. Sinha (2013) finds social status and better job opportunities as the important socio-economic factors of the Bengali language shift in Britain. Afreen (2020) similarly reports employment opportunities and a better standard of living as the major socio-economic forces of the Chakma language shift in Chittagong and Rangamati. In another study, Hossain & Tollefson (2007) considers Bengali as the significant official language of Bangladesh and finds it as the medium of communication in the workplace, public meeting, and media for achieving socio-economic status. Rahman (2019) discovers that Marma people are concerned with the proficiency of Bengali as it offers them good business and higher status in Bandarban. Fishman (1989) and Holmes (2013) find that when minority communities have fewer opportunities to advance socially or

economically, they attempt to overcome this socio-economic backwardness by shifting to the majority language in search of employment in the wage-earning sector.

Educational factors play an essential role in the study of minority language shifts. Matiki (1996-97) considers educational factors as decisive factors that can play a significant role in language shift and maintenance. Matiki (1996-97) finds the medium of instruction as one of the educational factors of language shift and shows that Chilomwe has never been used in Malawi schools as a subject of study or a medium of instruction. Mugaddam (2022) investigates the language shift of ethnic migrant groups in Khartoum and finds that minority ethnic students cannot receive instruction in their ethnic languages in schools. Mohsin (2003) similarly finds that most of the ethnic students of Bangladesh receive Bengali instruction in the classroom, and their education curriculum does not include their culture, customs, and way of living. Lack of ethnic language textbooks and teachers in different school education levels are the other factors influencing the language shift of minority communities (Rahman, 2010; Sultana, 2011; Huq, 2017). Afreen (2013) finds that the education system of Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) follows a national curriculum and textbooks, and the minority ethnic students have few opportunities to learn the Chakma language at schools which consequently leads them to shift to Bengali. Other studies (Rahman, 2010; Bhuiyan, 2016; Reza and Ullah, 2023) show that most of the indigenous communities of Bangladesh do not have textbooks and teachers in their ethnic languages. Hornberger and Coronel-Molina (2004) find that the education system and policy influence Quechua speakers to shift to the Spanish language, where Spanish is the official language of schools. Rahman (2022) similarly notices that languages of ethnolinguistic minorities have long been overlooked by most of the educational policies of Bangladesh.

2.1 Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework is a structure that best explains the natural progression of the phenomenon to be studied (Camp, 2001). The conceptual framework explains the relationship between the central concepts of a study. It is arranged in a coherent structure to visually display interrelated ideas (Grant and Osanloo, 2014). Huberman (1994) considers conceptual framework a 'graphical or narrative form' that shows the key variables or constructs and their presumed relationship (p.18). The researcher developed the conceptual framework of this study based on a literature review of existing studies on the topic. This framework served as a guide to support this research and helped understand the investigated phenomenon's different demographic, socio-economic, and educational

factors (language shift). Figure 1 illustrates the factors incorporated in this developed model:

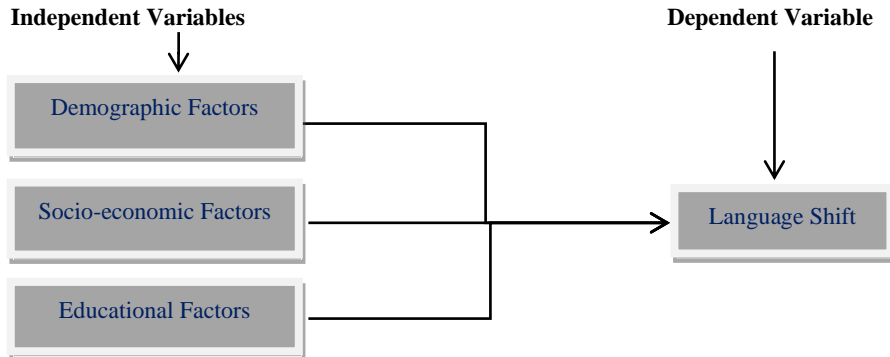


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework on the Factors of Rakhain Language Shift

The model summarizes the significant factors that influenced the shift of the Rakhine language into Bengali. The conceptual framework used demographic, socio-economic, and educational factors as independent variables and language shift as dependent variables.

3. Methodology

This section describes sampling, instrumentation, data processing, and analysis techniques used in the present study.

3.1 Sampling

A stratified random sampling technique was used in the present study. According to Taherdoost (2016), stratified random sampling is the “technique of dividing the population into strata or subgroups, and taking a random sample from each subgroup based on gender and occupation” (p.21). The advantage of using stratified random sampling is ensuring the representation of all population groups in the study (Acharya et al., 2013). The present study was conducted with randomly selected 120 Rakhain people of Kuakata and Cox’s Bazar. Among the 120 respondents, 60 were selected from Kuakata, and the other 60 were selected from Cox’s Bazar. All the respondents were bilinguals in Rakhain and Bengali languages. The reason for using the stratified random sampling technique is to divide the target population (N) into non-overlapping sub-population known as ‘strata’ and then do the simple random sampling among the strata. With regard to the target population of the study, the sample population was grouped into different strata, including parents, students, business people, job holders, and academicians. The reason behind grouping into different strata is that involving the different groups in the study is necessary for the result of the

current study to draw a complete and inclusive picture of the research objectives.

3.2 Instrumentation

A structured questionnaire (see the appendix) was used as the instrument of the study. The questionnaire consisted of 12 items taken and modified from the literature review on demographic, socio-economic, and educational factors of minority language shift. The items were designed to elicit responses following a five-point Likert Scale (1932) from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree.'

3.3 Data Processing and Analysis

The questionnaire's five-point Likert Scale (1932) produced quantitative data, and the responses of the 12 items were coded as strongly agree = 5, agree = 4, neutral = 3, disagree = 2, strongly disagree = 1. The data generated from the questionnaire were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS version 20). Two categories of descriptive statistics (frequency & mean) were used for each item to find the influence of different demographic, socio-economic, and educational factors on the Rakhine language shift. The mean scores of each item follow mean scores of 5-3.5, suggesting 'significant influence,' mean scores of 3.49-2.5, indicating 'moderate influence,' and mean scores of 2.49-1.5, implying 'insignificant influence.'

3.4 Ethical Considerations

The researcher was aware of the ethical issues at every step of this research study, including sensitivity and respect for individuals and research sites (Creswell, 2018). This study protected participants' confidentiality by concealing their identities (Best, 2012). Additionally, the participants were assured that their responses were kept confidential (Johnson & Christensen, 2019). During the data collection, the researcher took consent from the participants. All of them participated voluntarily in the research. While selecting participants, the researcher said they were free to decide whether they would participate in the study. The researcher also ensured that the participants could withdraw from the study at any time without giving any explanation to the researcher. In addition, the questionnaire was formulated very carefully so that it could not threaten their ethnolinguistic identity, and it was assured that the collected data would be kept anonymous and confidential.

3.5 Limitations of the Study

The current study has some limitations. Firstly, although the study's participants were 120, they were sampled only from two tourist sites-

Kuakata and Cox's Bazar. If the samples were taken from other Rakhain living areas like Khepupara, Taltali, Rangabali, and Maheshkhali, the general tendency of language shift of the Rakhain community could have been traced. Secondly, the study could have covered more factors of the Rakhain language shift. Thirdly, varied research instruments like in-depth interviews and focus group discussions could have been used. Additional research may be undertaken to fill in these gaps.

4. Findings and Discussion

In order to explore the influence of demographic, socio-economic, and educational factors on the Rakhine language shift, descriptive statistics (frequency and mean) were employed on each of the items of the factors. Item nos. 1, 2, 3, and 4 of the questionnaire were designed to reveal the influence of the demographic factors on the Rakhain language shift. In contrast, items nos. 5, 6, 7, and 8 were constructed to show the influence of the socio-economic factors, and items nos. 9, 10, 11, and 12 were employed to indicate the influence of the educational factors on the Rakhain language shift into Bengali. The findings were presented in three tables. Table-1 indicates the influence of demographic factors on the Rakhain language shift. At the same time, table-2 showed the influence of socio-economic factors, and table-3 revealed the influence of educational factors on the Rakhain language shift into Bengali.

Table 1: Influence of Demographic Factors (age level, gender identity, and marriage pattern) on Rakhain Language Shift

The results in Table 1 showed that item no. 1, 'Age level of children

Item No.	Statements	5	4	3	2	1	M
1.	Children's age level influences the shift of the Rakhain language into Bengali.	6.67%	9.16%	12.50%	25.00%	46.67%	2.40
2.	The age level of the young adult group influences the shift in the Rakhain language	42.50%	39.17%	4.17%	8.33%	5.83%	4.04
3.	Gender identity (male/female) of the language user is related to the shift in the Rakhain language	36.67%	38.33%	10.00%	10.83%	4.17%	3.93
4.	The marriage pattern (exogamous) of the language users affects the shift of the Rakhain language.	40.83%	36.67%	5.84%	13.33%	3.33%	3.98

influences the shift of Rakhain language into Bengali,' had the lowest mean (M=2.04), where 71.67% (the aggregated result of disagree and strongly disagree) of the respondents denied that age level of children influenced Rakhain language shift. The finding was consistent with the study of Grenier

(1984), who found a lower rate of language shift among the children age group. The results in Table 1 revealed that item no. 2, 'Age level of young adult group influences the shift of Rakhain language' had the highest mean ($M=4.04$), where 81.67% (the aggregated result of strongly agree and agree) of the respondents acknowledged that age level of young adult group highly influenced the shift of Rakhain language. The finding supported the study of Grenier (1984), who found a higher rate of language shift among the young adult age group and a slow trend of language shift among language users who already exceeded the age of thirty-five. The results in Table 1 indicated that item no. 3 'Gender identity (male/female) of the language user is related to the shift of Rakhain language' had a higher mean ($M=3.93$) where 75.00% (the aggregated result of strongly agree and agree) of the respondents admitted that gender identity (male/female) of the language user greatly influenced the shift of Rakhain language. The finding was consistent with previous studies (Williamson and Eerel, 1980; Grenier, 1984). Referring to the influence of marriage patterns on Rakhain language shift, the results showed that item no. 4 had the second highest mean ($M=3.98$), where 77.50% (the aggregated result of strongly agree and agree) of the respondents supported the view that inter-ethnic (exogamous) marriage pattern of the language users prominently influenced the shift of Rakhain language. The current study's findings supported prior studies (Holmes, 2013; Namei, 2008; Baker, 2011; Clyne, 2005; Clyne & Kipp, 1999).

Table 2: Influence of Socio-economic Factors (social status, economic advancement, good jobs, and doing business) on Rakhain Language Shift

Item No.	Statements	5	4	3	2	1	M
5.	Social status is related to using Bengali, influencing the Rakhain language shift.	30.00%	35.83%	17.50%	11.67%	5.00%	3.74
6.	Economic advancement is associated with using Bengali, which affects the Rakhain language shift.	48.33%	37.50%	7.50%	4.17%	2.50%	4.25
7.	Getting good jobs is related to using Bengali, which causes the Rakhain language shift.	51.67%	38.33%	8.33%	1.67%	0.00%	4.40
8.	Doing business with local people and tourists is related to using Bengali, which influences the Rakhain language shift.	43.33%	45.83%	6.67%	2.50%	1.67%	4.27

The results in Table 2 demonstrated that item no. 5 'Social status is related to the use of Bengali which influences Rakhain language shift' had a higher

mean (M=3.74) where 65.83% (the aggregated result of strongly agree and agree) of the respondents admitted that social status was related to the use of Bengali which highly influenced them to shift into Bengali. The finding was consistent with the study of Sinha (2013). The results in Table 2 revealed that item no. 6, 'Economic advancement is associated with the use of Bengali that affects Rakhain language shift,' had a higher mean (M=4.25), where 85.83% (the aggregated result of strongly agree and agree) of the respondents supported the view that economic advancement was connected to the use of Bengali that significantly promoted Rakhain language shift. The finding was similar to previous studies (Afreen, 2020; Huq, 2017; Rahman, 2019). The results in Table 2 indicated that item no.7 had the highest mean (M=4.40), where 90.00% (the aggregated result of strongly agree and agree) of the respondents admitted that getting good jobs was related to the use of Bengali, which significantly affected them to shift into Bengali. The finding was consistent with that of many studies (Mufwene, 2001; Brenzinger, 2006; Kandler et al., 2010; Sinha, 2013; Huq, 2017). The results in Table 2 also showed that item no. 8 had the second highest mean (M=4.27), where 89.16% (the aggregated result of strongly agree and agree) of the respondents supported the view that doing business with local people and tourists was related to the use of Bengali which highly influenced them to shift into Bengali. The finding was supported by the study of Huq (2017).

Table 3: Influence of Educational Factors (medium of instruction, lack of ethnic teachers and textbooks, education system & policy) on Rakhain Language Shift

The results in Table 3 revealed that item no. 9, 'In the classroom, most of the

Item No.	Statements	5	4	3	2	1	M
9.	In the classroom, most teachers use Bengali as the medium of instruction rather than the Rakhain language.	40.83%	45.00%	8.33%	4.17%	1.17%	4.19
10.	Rakhain language teachers are not available from primary to secondary level education	51.67%	42.50%	3.33%	2.50%	0.00%	4.43
11.	Rakhain language textbooks are not used from primary to secondary level education	50.83%	41.67%	4.17%	3.33%	0.00%	4.40
12.	Education system and policy promote the Rakhain language shift into Bengali	33.33%	37.50%	20.83%	6.67%	1.67%	3.94

teachers use Bengali as the medium of instruction than Rakhain language,' had the third highest mean ($M=4.19$) where 85.83% (the aggregated result of strongly agree and agree) of the respondents supported the view that most of the teachers used Bengali in the classroom which greatly influenced Rakhain students to shift into Bengali. The results also indicated that item no. 10, 'Rakhain language teachers are not available from primary to secondary level education,' had the highest mean ($M=4.43$), where 94.17% (the aggregated result of strongly agree and agree) of the respondents asserted that Rakhain language teachers were not recruited in primary and secondary level education to teach Rakhain students which significantly influenced them to shift into Bengali. The finding supported previous studies (Mugaddam, 2022; Sultana, 2011; Huq, 2017; Hudyma, 2012). Another important finding of Table 3 manifested that item no. 11, 'Rakhain language textbooks are not used from primary to secondary level education,' had the second highest mean ($M=4.40$), where 92.50% (the aggregated result of strongly agree and agree) of the respondents acknowledged that Rakhain language textbooks were not used from primary to secondary level education which highly influenced them to use Bengali textbooks. As a result, they shifted to Bengali. The finding aligned with prior studies (Afreeen, 2013; Rahman, 2010; Huq, 2017). The results in Table 3, furthermore, showed that item no. 12 had a higher mean ($M=3.94$), where 70.83% (the aggregated result of strongly agree and agree) of the respondents admitted that the educational system and policy prominently influence the Rakhain language shift. The finding supported previous studies (Hornberger and Coronel-Molina, 2004; Rahman, 2022; Afreeen, 2013).

5. Conclusion

The current study has investigated demographic, socio-economic, and educational factors of the Rakhain language shift and shown the extent of the influence of those factors on the Rakhain language shift into Bengali. The study's overall findings indicate a significant influence of demographic, socio-economic, and educational factors on the Rakhine language shift in Kuakata and Cox's Bazar. The researcher believes that the study's findings would contribute to a better understanding of the critical factors of language shift in any ethnic minority community in Bangladesh. The findings of the study have important implications for the Rakhine community of Bangladesh. The Rakhain people can be benefited from this study by getting an insight into the dominant factors of the Rakhain language shift. They can know those factors and take necessary actions to maintain their ethnic language. The findings of the study also have pedagogical implications for language teachers, sociolinguistic researchers, curriculum designers, and policymakers.

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Appendix Survey Questionnaire

Following are a number of statements with which you agree or disagree. As different respondents have different opinions, these are not right or wrong answers. Please indicate your opinion about each statement by putting a tick mark (✓) in only one box, which best shows the extent to which you agree or disagree with the statement. Your responses will be used for research purposes only. Thank you very much for your cooperation.

SL No	Statements	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1.	The age level of children influences the shift of the Rakhain language into Bengali					
2.	The age level of the young adult group influences the shift in the Rakhain language					
3.	Gender identity (male/female) of the language user influences the shift of Rakhain language into Bengali					
4.	The marriage pattern (exogamous) of the language user affects the shift of the Rakhain language into Bengali					

5.	Social status is related to the use of Bengali, which influences the Rakhain language shift					
6.	Economic advancement is associated with the use of Bengali, which affects the Rakhain language shift					
7.	Getting good jobs is related to the use of Bengali, which causes Rakhain language shift					
8.	Doing business with local people and tourists is related to the use of Bengali, which influences the Rakhain language shift					
9.	In the classroom, most of the teachers use Bengali as the medium of instruction than the Rakhain language					

10.	Rakhain language teachers are not available from primary to secondary level education					
11.	Rakhain language textbooks are not used from primary to secondary level education					
12.	Education system and policy promote Rakhain language shift into Bengali					