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SOCIOLINGUISTICS DYNAMICS OF AIMOL LANGUAGE

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Abstract:

The Indian government acknowledged Aimol as a tribe in Manipur in 1956. There are about 3902 population of Aimol in Manipur (Census 2011). They reside in Churachandpur, Kangpokpi, Chandel and Tengnoupal districts of Manipur. It is reported that Aimol also resides in Cachar district of Assam. Aimol language belongs to Tibeto-Burman language family. There is no government or private schools in Manipur that use the Aimol language as a medium of instruction. However it has a rich cultural heritage. It is supported by the oral literature such as proverbs, folktales, riddles, folksongs and folkdances. The primary aim of the paper is to assess the social dynamics of Aimol language. The paper may bring the idea to chalk out the problem and measures to improve the language for future generation. It also tries to find out the ways and means to preserve the culture and endangered language of Aimol in Manipur and other parts of Northeast India.

Key Words: Aimol, Preservation, Clan, Religion

1. Introduction

Aimol is the name of the language as well as the community that speak the language. It is a recognized tribe of Manipur. It was recognized in 1956 by government of India. The present total population of Aimol is 3902 (Census 2011). The tribe is found in Tengnoupal, Chandel, Churachandpur, and Kangpokpi district of Manipur. The Aimol occupied mostly in the plane or valley of Manipur.

The distribution patterns certainly show that the tribe doesn't occupy a particular area. They settled in different parts of Manipur. The Aimol people themselves have a pride in their language and have taken effort to preserve it and encourage its usage.

According to Lt.-Colonel J. Shakespear (1912), p151, Aimol is the name of a village site. It is probably Ai-mual. "Ai" is the Lushai name of a berry and also means crab and appears in Ai-zawl, or Aijal. "Mual" is the Lushai for a spur of a hill. It is a very common in fact almost a universal custom to call a new village site, if it has no recognized name, after the site of the old village, and probably the original Aimual would be found in the centre of the Lushai Hills.

According to Kh. Okhup, (2017), p16; Literally 'Ai' is the generic name of cardamom family locally called 'Aikuhng' (the reed which used by the magicians and priests in their enchanting and conjuring affairs) and other 'Ai' plants like Ai-eng (turmeric). Aithing (ginger) and Aitaang (arrow root), Aimarui (a wild ginger) etc. which are also used as a core of medicines, spells and spices. The real and main originating term of Ai is the Aikuhng of black colour locally called Aivomkuhng which exceptionally used as an essentially core for medicine and a secret substance for the priest's spell and Mual is the spur or ridge of a hill range. Therefore the term 'Ai-mual' means the spur of a hill range where the Ai plants were growing therein and thereabouts.

2. Family

The family is the nucleus of all other social organizations. The whole social structure is built of family units. The Aimol family is divided into the following types. They are;

(i) Patrilocality: The type of family where the couple live at the residence of the husband after marriage. This type of family is practiced by the Aimol community.

(ii) Neolocality: This is the type of family where the couple lives at the independent place separated from the family of both the bride and the groom. This is rarely practiced by the community.

(iii) Matrilocality: This is also another type of family where the husband and wife live at the residence of the wife after marriage. This is not acceptable to Aimol community.

(iv) Nuclear family: The family where the only husband, wife and their children live together in one roof. This is the most common form of family in the society.

3. Clan

Clan is a group of people interrelated by ancestry or marriage. It is observed that the number of clan in Aimol mentioned in the previous paper published in Language in India, Vol.18:12 December 2018 is misappropriated; In addition to these, the number of clans and sub clans in Aimol are given in the alphabetical order; Bongte, Chaithu, Chongom, Chongom Laita, Dareng, Darkhumpu, Dhurnai, Hlanghal, Khochung(Khoichung)/Leivon, Khosir, Laita, Lanu, Lianate Lanu, Lungdin, Lunglai Lanu, Mangte, Misou, Pakei, Rhangete, Rhingnar, Ruante Laita, Ruante Lanu, Ruijom(Ruijong), Sairualpu, Samte, Semthi Lanu, Serto, Shiarlua/Sialloa(Sumliai), Sialing Lanu, Siajong, Songthu, Sumbukpu, Thoirei, Tuiralreng, Vollhopu, Vongte, Wansoi etc.(Aimol Literature Society, Manipur)

The traditional Village Council called Khua Kanputna is the main political organization of a village which constituted by the eight cabinet members(councilors) entitled Pasakariat, the sort of executive staffs or functionary staffs called Aripu consists of five members with two assistants. The cabinet members and the sort of executive of a Village Council are formed through the system of succession by promotion from the primary members known as Thuikalnai. This system of administration is still practiced in today's society.

4. Birth

In the past a child was born in a house with the help of a midwife. After the birth of a child, it is wrapped with an old piece of cloth. The umbilical cord of the child is cut by the midwife with a sharp piece of bamboo and is buried at the corner of the outside of the house. The midwife who helped the mother of the child in giving birth was presented a pot of rice beer called zu, rice locally called chahchai, some amount of cotton called patdang and some amount of money or a female cloth is presented sometimes as a gift for her service.

5. Marriage

There are three types of marriage in Aimol. First is the marriage by elopement, the second is marriage by engagement and the third is the child engagement which is not practiced nowadays. In the case of arrange-marriage the proposal of marriage comes from the parents of the boy. Marriage by engagement is the sacred form of marriage and is the common form of marriage in the society. The marriage by elopement is not encouraged in the society.

6. Death

According to traditional practice, the nature or kind of death is divided into three categories. They are the natural death (ahua thi), unnatural death(Saara thi) and the infant death(Naidangchaara thi). The graveyard of natural death is called Mitaam than, the graveyard of unnatural or accidental death is called Saarathi than and the graveyard of infant is called Naite than. The system of division of graveyards has been abandoned after the advent of Christianity in the society.

7. Musical Instruments

Some of the important traditional musical instruments used by the Aimol are;

- (i) Khuang (drum)
- (ii) Rosem (a kind of flute made of bamboo)
- (iii) Sananta (a kind of guitar which is used as violin)
- (iv) Saraki (a mithun horn for producing sound)
- (v) Taangpu (an instrument made of bamboo)
- (vi) Daar (small size gong)
- (vii) Pengkul (bamboo trumpet) etc.

8. Dress

There are two kinds of dresses worn by Aimol. One is the dress worn by male and another is the dress worn by female.

- (i) The dresses worn by male are;
 - (a) Amthal (worn over the shoulders)
 - (b) Ponchial (worn over the shoulders)
 - (c) Ralngam buchun (worn over the shoulders)
 - (d) Uikechu (worn on head as turban)
 - (e) Arsi aam (worn over shoulder)
 - (f) Puanchai (domestic use) etc.
- (ii) The dress worn by female are
 - (a) Puante (worn over the shoulders)
 - (b) Saipuikhup (worn over the shoulders)
 - (c) Senchial (worn on the waist)
 - (d) Sentur/senturut (worn on the waist)
 - (e) Khamtaang (worn on the waist)
 - (f) Muikhaamja (worn over shoulder)
 - (g) A-emjiak (worn over shoulder)
 - (h) Thangbebor (worn over shoulder) etc.

9. Religion

The traditional religion of Aimol is animism. The old believers were heathen or pagan. They believed in the existence of a supreme God called Pathian or God of Heaven). The Aimol believed the creator of the earth called Siburai or Subarai who created the world. It is believed that there is existence of soul and life after death. It is believed that the soul of a common man after death went to the abode of the dead person known as Mithikhua or Athikhua.

According to traditional beliefs there are two types of spirit such as evil spirits and the good spirits. They believed that the good spirit causes good and gives prosperity to mankind while the evil spirit brings harms, sorrows, illness and calamities to human beings. The evil spirits or devils worshipped by them are Ram Pathian, Tui Pathian, Thing Pathian, Mithivaang, Rihpui, Laaijei, Khonam raaikhua, Chakoroknu, Mimasi. The good spirits they worshipped are Inn Pathian, Sor Pathian, Nisua pathian, Chung Pathian, Chapite, Siburai etc. In the younger generation all of the Aimol people have adopted Christianity as the main religion.

10. Economic Life

The Aimol tribes live both in the plain and the hills of Manipur. Agriculture is the main occupation. Rice is their staple food. They practiced plain cultivation also. Additional occupation includes fishing, hunting and collection of forest products etc. They grow vegetables, fruits and rear domestic animals of different variety, which are the part of the main source of daily income. The main agricultural products are rice, maize, arum, banana, potato, sweet potato, beans, pepper etc. They rear animals like cows, pigs, ducks, dogs, hens, etc. which are the favorites domestic animals. The women are expert in weaving. They weave different kinds of traditional cloth with various designs and colours. This also gives a source of income in the family. In olden days men were engaged in blacksmith works. There are both government and private sector employees. Some of them are also engaged in contract works and other businesses.

11. Education

Most of the Aimol people are literate. Early schooling is done as they have easy access to schools. Most of the children go to private run or government schools. They prefer private school to government schools. Children study especially in the English medium schools. They started studying from the pre-primary level to college and University level. Some of them are also doing different types of training in different courses including theology. Male literacy rate is higher than the female literacy. When the children are able to walk, speak and write fluently, they started schooling from their nearby locality. They go to school by van, car, bus, taxi etc. The percentage of children going to school is much higher than the last two or three years back. This shows that parents are interested in education rather than other business.

12. The Language

Aimol is the Tibeto-Burman language spoken in Manipur. It has subject-object-verb (SOV) word order and pronominal marking on verb. Different word classes are formed by affixation. 'A Descriptive Grammar of Aimol' has been written as a PhD thesis in the Manipur University, Canchipur, Imphal. Some few books have also been written in Aimol language. Mention may be made of "The Customary laws and Practices of Aimol Tribe of Manipur, India", "Dictionary of Aimol", "Traditional Folk songs of Aimol" which are published by Sarup Book Publishers Pvt. Ltd, New Delhi and some other books and journals are also written. The language isn't recognized by government of Manipur for use as a medium of instruction and examination in any private and government schools of Manipur. Aimol has no script. Roman alphabet is used for writing books, hymns and other journals. There is slight dialect variation from region to region. Majority of the speakers are settled in Tengnoupal district of Manipur. Manipuri or Meiteilon is used as lingua franca for communication with other tribe or community.

13. Grammatical features of the language

- (a) Gender is not grammatically marked in this language. It has natural gender.
- (b) Number is not a grammatically category.
- (c) There are six case markers which are expressed by means of postposition, which means case markers are put after the nouns.
- (d) There are cardinal numeral and ordinal numeral in Aimol.
- (e) The normal word order in an unmarked sentence is subject-object-verb (SOV).
- (f) Negation and Interrogation is formed by suffixation.
- (g) There is no grammaticalized tense in Aimol
- (h) There is a future marker which is suffixed to the verb.
- (i) There are proper aspect markers in Aimol

14. Monolingualism

The monolingual speakers are not found among Aimol. They can speak Manipuri, English, Hindi and some other regional and neighboring languages. So we can say that most of the people are non-monolingual.

15. Bilingualism

There is bilingualism in Aimol society. An Aimol speaker used mother tongue with family members at home and it also uses Manipuri at market places or neighboring communities. An Aimol student speaks Aimol or mother tongue at home and uses English in schools. So they are bilingual according to the circumstances or situations.

16. Multilingualism

Multilingualism is the ability of an individual or community to use three or more languages. It is common in multilingual societies like India where people use different languages for different purposes. There is also multilingualism in the community because Aimol use mother tongue at home, Manipuri or Meiteilon for communication with other communities, English in education and official work and Hindi while travelling or communication with people from other states. In this regard we can also say that Aimol are multilingual. Fluency of English is also found among the Aimol students and educated persons.

17. Intergenerational Language Transmission

Most of the children uses mother tongue at home. Mother tongue is used when they are trying to communicate with their parents and grandparents at home. Grandparents are not only the mother tongue speakers at home. All the communications at home and within the community are done in the mother tongue. Outside home or community, they use other languages like Manipuri, English, Hindi or other languages according to the conditions and situations. According to UNESCO, intergenerational language transmission is a key factor in assessing the vitality and endangerment of a language. A language is considered healthy when children naturally acquire it as their first language at home. There is strong intergenerational language transmission in the community.

18. Language attitude

Aimol people use their language at home as well as outside the home for communications among themselves. For communication with other tribes, friends and relatives who belonged to different language groups, they use Manipuri or Meiteilon, English or Hindi and other languages etc.

The language attitude of the community towards their mother tongue is very high. There is great effort to maintain their language in order to preserve their identity. They love to use their mother tongue at home as well as outside the home. Language is the marker one's ethnic identity. In every functions and occasions like marriage and other ceremonies they use their mother tongue. Sometimes it is mixed with Manipuri or Meiteilon when the congregation includes people from other communities. Even at the bazar or other workplaces also they used their mother tongue for communication among themselves. The domains of language used among children and elders are very high in the community. This shows that they want to preserve and enrich their language. They have translated Bible and gospel hymns in Aimol language. Most of the other books are also written in the mother tongue. Aimol people always try to develop their language and conserve and revitalize it.

19. Mass Media

There are some programmes done in All India Radio(AIR), Imphal. There are digital video films and albums produced in Aimol language. This includes both the gospel and secular albums. Many more digital films and albums may come up in future also. The bulletins or journals are also written in the mother tongue so that the native speakers may understand it. Most of the conversations and other discussion in the media platforms like facebook, youtube, whatsApps, and instagram are done in the native language.

20. Dialectical Variation

There is a slight dialectical variation in Western side and Eastern side of the Aimol. The western side is confined in Churachandpur and Kangpokpi district of Manipur. The Eastern side of the Aimol is in Tengnoupal and Chandel district of the state. The variations are some lexical items and phonology only. For instance; in the western side, they use the term yem 'beating a man' while the Eastern side they use it as we 'beating a man'. The future marker used in the Eastern Aimol is rang while the Western side

they use it hang. However they are mutually intelligible. It is used in different type of sentences and conversations.

21. Language use in social domains

Most of the Aimol people use mother tongue at home for communication between children, parents and grandparents. In the religious functions and other ceremonies also they use the Aimol language. In the church and other worship services they did in the native language. In other ceremonies like marriages, birthdays or festivals etc. it is done in Aimol language. In other workplaces and offices they use other languages like Manipuri or English or Hindi as the circumstances compels. In digital platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube they use their own language i.e. mother tongue for communication and conversations.

22. Impact of Globalization and Technology

Globalization and technological advancement have given both positive and negative impact on Aimol language. Globalization has increased the interaction with the dominant language and decreased the scope of intergenerational language transmission. Technology has created new opportunities for language preservation and revitalization.

Globalization has increased the use of dominant language such as English, Manipuri and Hindi in education, employment and public life. As a result, younger generations prefer to use these languages over Aimol which leads to gradual language shifts. On the other side the technology provides valuable tools for documenting and preserving the language. The researchers and the community members may create digital dictionaries, online grammars, electronics archives of folksongs, folktales, oral traditions etc. The social media can be used as platforms for sharing stories, poems and songs. The resources such as online language learning, e-books, online lessons can encourage the youngsters to use the Aimol language. It is the duty of the community to preserve and enrich our own language.

23. Recommendations

The following points are suggested for the improvement and development of Aimol language in future.

- (a) To strengthen the intergenerational language transmission
- (b) Documentation of oral histories, folktales, folksongs, traditional knowledge system.
- (c) Preparation of digital archive to preserve the linguistic and cultural heritage.
- (d) To promote the use of the language in digital platforms.
- (e) To encourage the use of the language in social, cultural and religious activities
- (f) To organize workshops, seminars, conferences on language development such as preparation of proper vocabularies, primers, pictorial glossaries etc.

24. Conclusion

From the study it can be concluded that Aimol is a tribe which has rich art and culture. It has proper language. It has proper traditional dress and musical instrument and other cultural artifacts. They have the subject-object-verb order in different sentence constructions. Intergenerational language transmission is not so affected. Education is also almost improved. The main thrust area should be the development of the language. Children and youngsters must be encouraged to use the language at home and other domains. We need to write beginners books like primers, vocabularies, pictorial glossaries etc. We need to develop proper spellings for writing books and other journals. We should try to enrich our literatures. Documentation work of Aimol oral literature is the need of the hour. It is highly needed for the community. This will preserve the ancient history and culture of the Aimol and will become a reference book for the younger generation of the community. The paper will also be updated time to time.

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