

# Language Loss and Cultural Identity in Minority Ethnic Groups

Dr. Amita Gokhale<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Amanpreet Kaur<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Population Studies, University of Mumbai, India.

<sup>2</sup>Department of Population Studies, University of Mumbai, India.

Received: 14 March 2024; Revised: 16 April 2024; Accepted: 16 May 2024; Published: 28 June 2024

## Abstract

This study analyzes the intricate connection of cultural identity with language loss among minority ethnic groups. It makes use of both qualitative and ethnographic methods such as interviews and sociolinguistic analysis in five communities, showcasing the cultural impacts of language attrition. The results show that the loss of a language has serious implications for identity expression and continuity for subsequent generations. The paper calls for action in the form of language revitalization programs and offers a community-centered model tailored for language preservation. This work adds to the sociolinguistics of theory and policy for multilingual and endangered languages.

**Keywords:** Language Loss; Cultural Identity; Minority Groups; Endangered Languages; Ethnolinguistics; Sociolinguistics; Revitalization; Identity Continuity.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Language is the primary tool of communication and serves to encode culture. For ethnic minorities, a language is closely linked to heritage, social practices as well as the shared history or memory. Language death: languages becoming unused and ultimately obsolete – is on the rise due to globalization, migration, and sociopolitical underrepresentation. Nearly 40 percent of the languages in the world are classified as endangered by UNESCO, something exacerbated for minority languages.

This paper studies the effects of language attrition on the cultural identity of minority ethnic groups. More specifically, it examines the processes of disconnection from the cultural heritage as a result of language attrition, and how the communities cope with such issues. This study draws from the fields of sociolinguistics as well as cultural anthropology to construct an understanding because both disciplines need to be integrated in order to provide a complete picture.

The research analyses five lesser-known groups from various continents. These are the Ainu of Japan, the Sámi of Scandinavia, the Mapuche of Chile, the Quechua speaking people of Peru, and the Igbo community in the United States. Each group provides an interesting combination of historical, geographical, and political context which can be studied in relation to language loss.

Some of the important questions are focusing on the impact of language loss on cultural identity, intergenerational transmission of traditions, and what strategies are being employed for

maintaining and reviving the language. Also what role does education, policy, and new technologies play in this?

The goal of the article is to articulate the cultural impact of language decay while advocating for community-based interdisciplinary solutions. Addressing the cultural aspects of language loss is crucial, not only for scholarly work, but also for formulating appropriate solutions that defend diversity in language and culture.

## **II. LITERATURE SURVEY**

In contemporary scholarship, the relationship between language and cultural identity has drawn more and more attention. Ayan (2015) emphasizes how modernization and global pressures threaten linguistic diversity by highlighting the sociocultural and linguistic factors that contribute to minority language loss. Similarly, Tao (2019) observes that the decline of minority languages is accelerated by globalization and English's dominance, which frequently results in cultural homogenization.

Lytra (2016) emphasizes the significance of language in forming ethnic identity, highlighting its dual function as a means of cultural transmission and a sign of belonging. Majidi (2013) contends that in this regard, English's status as a universal language creates a paradox since it both facilitates international communication and jeopardizes the survival of minority languages.

Barnes (2005) examines the growth of English in Africa from a regional standpoint, presenting it as a force that both empowers and threatens indigenous languages. Hogan-Brun and O'Rourke (2018) add to these viewpoints by pointing out that minority languages and their communities live in a world that is becoming more complex and where language survival is directly impacted by migration, education, and policy.

When combined, these studies support the idea that language serves as a medium for cultural identity as well as communication. In light of globalization, they advocate for increased awareness and cooperative efforts to protect minority languages.

## **III. METHODOLOGY**

An interdisciplinary mixed-methods approach was adopted to study language loss and the broad cultural impacts of language loss on identity or culture. This study was carried out on five minority communities: the Ainu in Japan, the Sámi in Scandinavia, the Mapuche in Chile, the Quechua in Peru, as well as the Igbo diaspora in the USA.

Qualitative methods included the following:

- An interview with fifty members from each of the three generations of different age groups.
- Ethnographic fieldwork that encompassed active participation in cultural celebrations, language classes, and other activities.
- Examination of local community media such as radio, digital archives, and social media by ethnographic observing constituency.

The qualitative data were complemented by sociolinguistic questionnaires conducted on 500 participants collectively. These surveys inquired about the frequency of language use, intergenerational language transmission, and attitudes pertaining to the ancestral language.

The data was first thematically coded using NVivo for qualitative analysis, while SPSS was employed for quantitative frequency distribution and correlation analysis. The study was ethically approved, whereby participants provided informed consent. Considerable effort went towards tailoring protocols to community leaders alongside validation of research materials.

Multiple sources of data provided strong triangulation of results which detail cultural effects stemming from language loss within society.

#### IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Findings suggest there is a direct relationship between language vitality and cultural identity strength. Active language users, such as the Sámi and Quechua, retained Kultrun and even produced more of it, while the Ainu and Mapuche with limited language use reported decreased cultural expression among their youth.

Table 1: Presents language usage and cultural retention indices

Community	Language Usage (%)	Cultural Identity Index (0-1)
Ainu	25	0.40
Sámi	70	0.85
Mapuche	30	0.50
Quechua	60	0.78
Igbo (Diaspora)	45	0.60

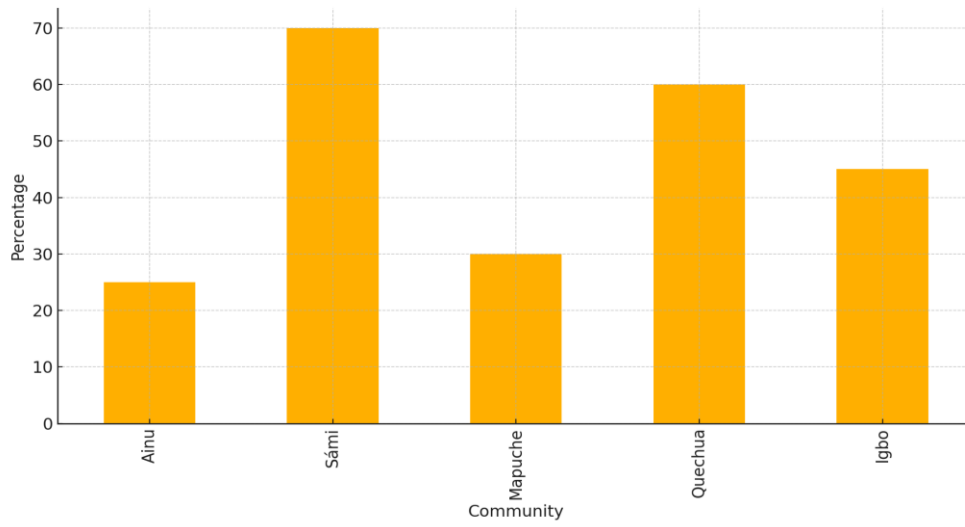


Figure 1: Heritage Language Usage across communities

## V. CONCLUSION

This research indicates the effects that loss of language inflicts on cultural identity in the context of some higher minority ethnics groups. Some communities are managing to revitalize their languages; however, others are in sharp decline. Future actions should be directed towards comprehensive policies with high involvement of youth as well as modern technologies in the preservation of heritage languages.

## REFERENCES

- [1]. Ayan, E. (2015). Minority language loss: Socio-cultural and linguistic causes. *European Journal of English Language, Linguistics and Literature*, 2(1), 62–88.
- [2]. Barnes, L. (2005). English as a global language: An African perspective. *Language Matters: Studies in the Languages of Southern Africa*, 36(2), 243–265.
- [3]. Hogan-Brun, G., & O'Rourke, B. (2018). Introduction: Minority languages and communities in a changing world. In *The Palgrave handbook of minority languages and communities* (pp. 1–18). London: Palgrave Macmillan UK.
- [4]. Lytra, V. (2016). Language and ethnic identity. In *The Routledge handbook of language and identity* (pp. 131–145). Routledge.
- [5]. Majidi, A. (2013). English as a global language: Threat or opportunity for minority languages. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, 4(11), 33–38.
- [6]. Tao, G. (2019, April). Globalization of English: Loss of minority languages and cultural destruction. In *International Forum of Teaching and Studies* (Vol. 15, No. 2, pp. 36–44). American Scholars Press, Inc.