

The Ecological Relationship Between The Lexicons Of Chatgaiya Language Of Bangladesh And Its Environment

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Abstract:

The paper attempts to find out the lexicons of Chatgaiya (also known as Chittagonian) language that have a special relationship with the environment of Chattogram. It is a language used in greater Chattogram region in oral communication. The approach used in this study is qualitative descriptive. The data were collected from the assignments given to the students of International Islamic University Chittagong of Bangladesh and from the books written on Chatgaiya language. To get the proper meaning of the lexicons, opinions were taken from two university teachers who are native Chatgaiya and who have a good idea of the lexicons of Chatgaiya language. The findings show that there are lexicons used in Chatgaiya language that reflect the culture and environment of native Chatgaiya.

Keywords: ecolinguistics, Chatgaiya, Chattogram, environment, lexicon, Bangladesh

1. Introduction:

Chatgaiya or Chittagonian (*Banglapedia*, 2022) is a language native to greater Chattogram (Coxs bazar, Rangamati, Bandarban, and Khagrach hari districts belong to greater Chattogram) of Bangladesh, which is in the south-east corner of the country and also native to parts of Rakhine state of Myanmar (Burma). There are 13 million native speakers of Chatgaiya language, ranked in the 88th position out of 7,111 living languages worldwide (*Ethnologue*, 2019). "Chittagonian is a member of the Bengali-Assamese (Suniti Kumar Chatterji, 1926) sub-branch of the Eastern group of Indo-Aryan languages (*Concise Encyclopedia of Languages of the World*, 2010; *Indo-Aryan Languages, Britannica*, 2022), a branch of the wider Indo-European language family".

A distinct environment, culture and language make Chattogram different from other regions of Bangladesh. Hills, mountains, rivers, lakes, and waterfalls have enriched the biodiversity of the region. The Bay of Bengal is to the west of Chattogram. Its hills and jungles abound in different types of plants, birds, and animals. Also, different types of fishes and crabs are found in the water of the rivers, lakes, and the bay. The livelihood of many people depends on their resources. It has the world's longest natural sea beach. All of these have contributed to form a way of life or culture of the people of the region which is called Chatgaiya culture. Chatgaiya culture is renowned for its uniqueness. Finding out the relationship between language and environment

has become a great area of interest for research of the linguists across the world nowadays. Since Chatgaiya is a language for native Chatgaiya people who have their own culture and own environment to live in, there might be some ecological relationship between Chatgaiya language and its environment. Although a few studies were done on Chatgaiya language on different issues, till now, no study has been done as per my knowledge on the ecological relationship between the lexicons of Chatgaiya language and its environment.

2. Literature Review

Einar Haugen first proposed "language ecology" at a conference in Chicago in 1972 (Fill & Mühlhäusler, 2001; Gerbig, 2003). He presented a paper at the conference titled "The Ecology of Language"; after that, the concept of "language ecology" or "ecology of language" has become popular in the domain of linguistics. He described language ecology as "the study of interactions between any given language and its environment." The ecology of a language is determined primarily by the people who learn it, use it, and transmit it to others (Fishman, 1973; Petri, 1972). His comparison between language and environment is similar to the ecological relationships between different species of animals and plants and their environment. This is a new approach in the multilingual settings of the globe. Haugen's environment refers not only to the physical setting but also to the social, cultural, and mental settings where the native speakers speak the language.

Haugen identified three dimensions of the ecology of language, and they are; 1) the natural environment, which relates to the connection between a language and its geographical location, climate and weather, and flora and fauna of that land where the language is used. 2) The social environment, which is concerned with the relationship between a language and its society regarding the population, religion, economy, and politics and 3) the psychological environment, which relates to the relationship between a language and other languages in a bilingual or multilingual context (Tang, 2020). To Pennycook (2004), "the ecology of language" is a means of understanding the relationship between language and environment. To him, it is how languages are embedded in social, cultural, economic, and physical ecologies and relationships to each other.' Hult (2012) mentions "language ecology" or "ecolinguistics" as "an umbrella term for a wide range of perspectives that seek to make connections between language and environment: using concepts related to ecology to understand social environments for multilingualism, analyzing discourses of environment and environmentalism, and describing relationships between biological and cultural diversity. Crystal said (2008) that ecolinguistics is such a study where the relationship between environment and language is fundamental, and it is parallel to the study of ecology concerning biology. He also termed ecolinguistics as "*language ecology*," *linguistic ecology*, or sometimes *green linguistics*.

Edward Sapir is one of the first authors who brought the idea of the relationship between language and environment to light at a conference before the American Anthropological Association in Washington D.C, in 1911. The title of his paper is "Language and Environment," and it is published by *American Anthropologist*. As Edward Sapir stated, "in actual society; even the simplest environmental influence is either supported or transformed by social forces" (Fill & Mühlhäusler, 2001). Sapir also stated, "any attempt to consider even the simplest element of culture as due solely to the influence of [natural] environment must be termed misleading"(Fill & Mühlhäusler, 2001). The statement indicates that language is influenced by environment since language is a part of the culture. According to Sapir, the vocabularies of different languages differ since vocabularies are pictures of both cultural environment and physical environment where the languages are used, and we can widen them into the characters of both environments (Fill & Mühlhäusler, 2001). It means that the vocabularies of a language reflect the

economy, profession, interests, knowledge, or beliefs of the language users and also reflect the geography where the language users dwell. For example, the language which is native to the people living in mountainous regions may abound in vocabularies related to the valley, falls, and different kinds of plants, birds, and animals. On the other hand, the language which is native to the users living in the coastal area may abound in vocabularies related to fishes, ships, storms, sand etc. Biologist Sutherland (2003) found that places like Indonesia and Papua New Guinea, with a high number of different biological species, also have a high number of different languages. On the other hand, the opposite scenario is seen in Europe; that is, Europe has fewer numbers of both.

So, we see that there is a very close relationship between language and environment regarding the types and nature of languages based on the types or nature of environment. So, if any change occurs in the language native to a region, it will affect the whole settings of the region. From an ecolinguistics perspective, language change leads the change to social and cultural environment, which is found in the Sultanate lexicon of Malay. Linguistic diversity should be protected to protect other diversity, like cultural or environmental across the globe. "If diversity is a prerequisite for successful humanity, then the preservation of linguistic diversity is essential, for language lies at the heart of what it means to be human"(Thompson & Gleason, 2001). So, the framework "ecology of language" is being used now throughout the world to make languages survive and to identify the conditions which are necessary to protect and reinvigorate those languages which are marginalized in broad societal conditions (Mufwene, 2001; Mühlhäusler, 2002).

2.1 Ecological Lexicon

According to Fill and Mühlhäusler (2001), from an ecolinguistics point of view, the relationship between language and environment occurs in the field of lexicon. Lexicons are collections of words which are seen as the assets of the language users. According to Elson and Pickett (1983), lexicon is the vocabulary of a language that the speakers of the language own. On the other hand, Haspelmath (2010) defines a lexicon as the mental dictionary of a language which the users of the language must own. Again, Crystal (2008) describes lexicon as an element which serves information regarding the characteristics of the words of a language. So, the words, phrases, or expressions that are the units of a language and that describe the environment

of a land of the native language users are called the ecological lexicon.

2.2 The Rationale of the Study

Because of irresistible globalization, many languages are under a great threat of becoming extinct especially, the unsponsored languages by the state in different parts of the world. The study may help to realize the necessity of protecting languages from extinction. Protecting linguistic and cultural diversity is one of the main goals of ecolinguistics (Myers & Patience, 1995).

3. Methodology:

The study focuses on some lexicons found in the expressions of Chatgaiya language, which have a unique ecological relationship with the environment or culture of the native speakers of that language. The data for the study were obtained going through several processes. The researcher is a native Chatgaiya and a close observer of Chatgaiya language regarding its functions and usages of lexicons. The researcher is also a teacher of linguistics at the International Islamic University Chittagong, Bangladesh. In one of the courses of *Masters in English Language Teaching* conducted by the researcher titled "Language Planning and ELT Policies", the researcher gave an assignment on the following topic to the students of 4 different semesters. Of them, 32 students were from autumn 2019, 46 were from spring 2020, 34 were from autumn 2020 and 35 were from Spring- 2022.

'Find out the lexicons with proverbs or phrases from Chatgaiya language which have a special relationship with the environment of Chattogram regarding flora, fauna, and culture. In your answer, write how they are special to the environment of Chattogram and explain the proverbs or phrases with the lexicons found in your capacity. You can write the assignment on any language instead of Chatgaiya if you are not a native Chatgaiya.'

All the assignments were taken on online except the spring 2022. A total of 147 students submitted assignments on the given topic. Of them, 82 students submitted their assignments in the Chatgaiya language since most of the students studying here were from the different parts of Chattogram. Of them, 48 were female students, and 34 were male students. The remaining students submitted their assignments on other local languages of Bangladesh like Noakhali, Sylheti etc. The students wrote Chatgaiya lexicons, words and sentences using English transliteration in their

assignments since they were asked to do so. There were variations among the students in the spelling of the same Chatgaiya words using English alphabets.

A total of 96 different lexicons with phrases, idioms or proverbs are found in their assignments. Of them, 27 lexicons were omitted from them since some students brought some irrelevant examples of lexicons which are not special to Chatgaiya language. This was done based on the book titled "Chattogramer Probad-Prabochon (Proverbs and Maxims of Chittagong)" (Barua, 2017) and the dictionary titled "Chottogramer Ancholik Bhashar Ovidhan (Dictionary of Chittagonian Local Language)" (Rafiq, 2017), which were written on Chatgaiya language using Bangla alphabets, and also on the experience and observation of the language of the researcher. Of them, the researcher selected ten lexicons with sayings mentioned by most of the students in their assignments, giving almost identical explanations to those discussed in this paper. Opinions of 2 university teachers who are native to Chatgaiya having expertise in the field of language were sought on the explanation given by the students. Qualitative descriptive approach is followed here, since it is appropriate for this study. The Chatgaiya words, lexicons, or sentences are shown using English transliteration. The English transliteration of Chatgaiya language may not always correspond to the actual pronunciation of Chatgaiya words. The English translation or meaning of each Chatgaiya word or sentence is also given.

4. Analysis and Result

This section presents the selected data, that is, the lexicons, their meanings or definitions, their relationship with the environment of the region, and the sayings or expressions based on the lexicons and their meanings.

Table -1.

Ecological Lexicon 1.	zuuir
Meaning /definition	It is a protector used by the farmers of the region to protect themselves from rain while ploughing land and sowing crops, especially during the rainy season.
How it is related to the environment	Traditionally, a <i>zuuir</i> is made out of local plants like bamboos and leaves which grow in abundance in the hilly areas of Chattogram.
Saying with the lexicon	zikka zor ikka zuuir from the side storm to the side <i>zuuir</i>
Meaning	This saying is used to mean 'the person who always looks for a convenient position'.
Ecological Lexicon 2.	uuni
Meaning /definition	It is a kind of dried sea fish. <i>uuni</i> is a traditional and very popular food in the Chattogram region.
How it is related to the environment	This is made from the fishes collected from the Bay of Bengal by the fishermen of the region going through some processes.

Saying with the lexicon	uuni oizon uuni be
Meaning	This saying is used to mean "to get skeleton". For example: no hai no hai din din one uuni oizon no eating no eating day by day you uuni be The sense of the expression is 'You are getting skeleton day by day since you are not eating (properly).'
Ecological Lexicon 3.	mezzan
Meaning /definition	It is a social gathering in which people from all walks of life are invited, and they are served with hot beef, <i>nolar zul</i> (soup of bone marrow), <i>chonar dal</i> (curry of mung bean) and white steamed rice. <i>mezzan</i> occurs on different occasions like death anniversary, birth anniversary etc. Usually, a huge quantity of food is cooked in a <i>mezzan</i> .
How it is related to the environment	It is a unique culture of Chattogram.
Saying with the lexicon	no thagili mezzainya baritho no thage. no have at the mezzan of house too no have
Meaning	The meaning of the saying is "Once unfortunate, always unfortunate."
Ecological Lexicon 4.	hunor
Meaning /definition	It is a kind of mask used in the mouth of cows to prevent them from eating crops.
How it is related to the environment	It is made from the outer skin of bamboo or climbing plants which grow hugely in the jungle of Chattogram region.
Saying with the lexicon	galoth hunor deon in the mouth hunor give
Meaning	This is used to mean 'to remain silent'. For example; hotha keya no hor? Galoth hunor dius na? utterance why not speak? In the mouth honour have given? The sense of the expression is "Why are you not speaking? Have you given <i>honour</i> in your mouth?"
Ecological Lexicon 5.	uuir
Meaning /definition	It is a raised platform in which the containers of crops like rice, beans etc. are kept to protect them from the dampness of the floor of home. Again, usually under a <i>uuir</i> goats, ducks and hens are kept at night.
How it is related to the environment	This <i>uuir</i> is made out of wood or bamboos and Chattogram region is famous for producing different kinds of wood and bamboos.
Saying with the lexicon	hode uirtol ar hode agortol where uuir under and where Agartala (an Indian town)
Meaning	The saying is used to refer to "an unusual comparison between two things or persons" or to mean "far difference."
Ecological Lexicon 6.	baniir
Meaning /definition	It is a container used to keep crops like rice and beans, usually carrying them from one place to another.
How it is related to the environment	A <i>baniir</i> is made out of the outer skin of bamboo and cane which grow in the jungle of the region.
Saying with the lexicon	foirur nozor bainirur honoth the poor glance baniir of at the corner
Meaning	This saying is used to mean "a man with narrow interest is accustomed to look at the narrow thing."
Ecological Lexicon 7.	moaf
Meaning /definition	<i>Moaf</i> is a kind of small wild cat. This cat usually attacks birds, especially hens and ducks, to eat their flesh to live on.
How it is related to the environment	They are found in the bushes or jungles of the region.
Saying with the lexicon	moafor hase kura бага deon. moaf at to hen lease
Meaning	The meaning of the saying is "to keep valuable things at the hand of a treacherous person."
Ecological Lexicon 8.	tiara
Meaning /definition	<i>tiara</i> is a kind of fence used along the boundary of cropland to protect crops from the attack of animals like cows or goats etc.
How it is related to the environment	It is made out of bamboo, which grows hugely in the jungles of Chattogram.

Saying with the lexicon	tiaraai keth hon tiara by crop eat
Meaning	The meaning of the saying is "breaking trust by the trustworthy."
Ecological Lexicon 9.	fouin
Meaning /definition	A specially designed pot used for making pitha in steam.
How it is related to the environment	It is made out of locally found clay by the local potter using local techniques.
Saying with the lexicon	bouth fouinur pida hoan many fouin of pitha eat
Meaning	The saying is used to mean 'experienced/expert' on something.'
Ecological Lexicon 10.	chani
Meaning /definition	A kind of trap for catching fish in Chattogram region.
How it is related to the environment	It is made out of bamboo, which grows in abundance in the jungles of the region.
Saying with the lexicon	chani boaon chani set up
Meaning	This saying is used here to mean 'to set a trap'

It is seen that the selected lexicons and sayings presented in the above table are related to the culture and environment of the region, i.e., Chattogram. The lexicons *zuiir*, *hunor*, *baniir*, *uuir*, *tiara* and *chani* are local products made out of local plants by the local craftsmen. So, they are naturally related to the flora or environment of the region. The lexicon *fouin* is also a local product with a unique design made from local clay by the local potter. Again, its usage reflects the culture of the region. The lexicon *uuni* is a kind of food, and food habit belongs to culture. Again, this food is made going through some processes or ways and the way of doing something or making something also belongs to a culture. The lexicon *moaf* is the name of a wild cat found in the bushes or jungles of the region living on the meats of the local birds like hen, duck etc. It is related to the fauna or environment of Chattogram. The lexicon *mezzan* is the name of a culture practised in Chattogram region, and culture belongs to environment. The sayings or expressions with the above-mentioned lexicons are highly connected to the environment of the region. The meaning and understanding of those sayings depend on the context and environment of the region. For example, the saying with the lexicon *zuiir* is formed based on an environmental phenomenon that is *zor* meaning 'storm'. The storm frequently occurs in Chattogram region, or the saying with the lexicon *fouin* is formed based on a cultural phenomenon that is *pida* or 'pitha'. It is a cultural practice to make and to eat different types of pithas on different occasions or in different seasons of the region.

These are some examples of lexicons related to the environment of Chattogram which indicate the entities of culture, flora and fauna of the region found in the study which have enriched Chatgaiya

language and among others: *modhubath* (a kind of food made specially in Chattogram region), *gonda pakkon* (a kind of pitha made in Chattogram), *vator mocha* (varieties of foods in a packet used as gift in the region), *zurka* (a kind of trap to catch fish), *duol* (kind of big container used for preserving rice), *uizza* (a kind protector used for keeping baby chickens in safe), *ichoin* (*ichoin* is used for irrigating water), *dula* (a kind of container used for keeping fishes), *bera* (a kind of fence used as wall to build houses), *lai* (a type of container for carrying crops), *luui* (*luui* is used for checking fishes from going away when water is irrigated for catching fish), *gil* (a kind of dead tree specially gauva tree used for climbing plants), *hoilda* (a kind of netted purse used for keeping coins), *gonda* (a kind of fuel made out of cow-dung used for cooking), *bena* (It is made of dried straw and used for keeping fire for a long time), *aari* (*aari* is used for measuring rice in Chattogram region), *sampan* (a special kind of vessel made in Chattogram) etc. are mention worthy found in the study. The above-mentioned *zurka*, *duol*, *uizza*, *ichoin*, *dula*, *bera*, *lai*, *luui* etc. are made out of bamboos and canes and *sampan* and *aari* are made out of local wood, which grows in abundance in the hilly areas of Chattogram using local techniques by local craftsmen. Based on those lexicons, idioms, maxims or proverbs are formed, which are parts of the treasury of knowledge only unique to the Chatgaiya language.

5. Conclusion:

The language which is not sponsored by a state is bound to be lost since the speakers have a tendency to learn the state language ignoring the language of their ancestors. As Fasold (1984) stated, "The language that governments use for legislative debate and the language in which laws are written and government documents are issued also means that can be used to promote a selected language or language variety". The government of Bangladesh brought an amendment to the constitution of Bangladesh and introduced 'Bangla-Procholon Ain', recognizing the state language of the country, which is 'Bangla' ('Bengali Language Implementation Act, 1987', 1987). 'Bengali' was replaced with 'Bangla' in 1988, bringing an amendment (Moore, 2001). Nothing is said in the constitution regarding the status of different indigenous or local languages of the country. Rather, the indigenous people are instructed to acculturate to 'Bangalee' culture. So, there is a high possibility of reducing the number of speakers of different languages, including Chatgaiya, in the country. If no step is taken by the state to protect a

language, the number of speakers of the language will automatically be decreasing day by day. The consequence which will remain for the language is death. With the death of a language, the treasury of the language which is the lexicons, phrases, wise sayings etc., which are formed out of the environment or culture and which already have created an unseen ecology with the region where the language is spoken, may embrace the same consequence that is death. The same fate may be embraced by Chatgaiya language if proper steps are not taken by the concerned authority to protect or maintain the language, and gradually the linguistic diversity of the country will be lost. Mühlhäusler, in his *Linguistic Ecology: Language Change and Linguistic Imperialism in the Pacific Region* (2002), expressed his worry about the decrease of linguistic diversity because of linguistic standardization out of the nationalistic program. The policy should be made to protect the linguistic diversity of a land by the government. Phillipson and Skutnabb-Kangas favoured language policy based on the ecology of language since it involves 'building on linguistic diversity worldwide, promoting multilingualism and foreign language learning, and granting linguistic human rights to speakers of all languages' (429).

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