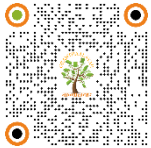


EFFECTS OF LINGUISTIC IMPERIALISM: A STUDY ON SEMANTIC NULLIFICATION AND PHONETIC AMBIGUITY

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ABSTRACT

The expansion of language has been a part of human history since the dawn of time, and language imperialism is no exception. Assamese is the official language of the state of Assam, India and the mother tongue of the Assamese community. As we continue to delve into the nuances of language and its associated benefits, it is important to understand the implications of language imperialism and its ability to create catastrophic consequences, such as semantic nullification and phonetic ambiguity. Linguistic imperialism is a phenomenon where dominant languages are imposed on minority communities, leading to the loss of cultural identity and linguistic diversity. This paper will explore the negative impact of linguistic imperialism, specifically semantic nullification and phonetic ambiguity of the Assamese language. This paper will discuss how linguistic imperialism results in the loss of meaning in indigenous languages, the loss of unique sounds and pronunciation, and the impact on cultural identity.

Keywords: Phonetic Ambiguity, Semantic Nullification, Assamese Language, Linguistic Imperialism, Dominant Language, Native Speaker

1. INTRODUCTION

Linguistic imperialism, at its core, refers to the hegemony of a language by a socio-politically or economically influential group, based on the notion of one language's superiority over another. It implies that one language is deemed superior to another, leading to the potential oppression of minority languages and the reduction of linguistic variety. This can have lasting and devastating consequences on minority communities, especially those in vulnerable positions. Linguistic imperialism refers to the imposition of a dominant language on a minority

community, leading to the loss of cultural identity and linguistic diversity. One of the consequences of linguistic imperialism is semantic nullification. Another consequence of linguistic imperialism is phonetic ambiguity. Language is a crucial element in shaping cultural identity. The imposition of dominant languages on minority communities leads to the loss of cultural identity and a sense of belonging. The preservation of indigenous languages is essential to promoting cultural diversity and understanding. It allows for the continuation of cultural practices and traditions unique to indigenous communities. Furthermore, it provides a sense of identity and pride, which is crucial for the well-being of individuals and communities. Therefore, it is crucial to recognize the importance of preserving indigenous languages and promoting linguistic diversity.

Sapir transformed language studies. The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis of linguistic relativity states language structure impacts reality perception [Sapir \(1921\)](#). This thesis expanded linguistic research and conversation by challenging universality and stability. Sapir established linguistic anthropology by analysing culture and language. He appreciated language's complexity via philosophy, anthropology, and psychology. Beyond linguistics, Sapir paints a whole image of language. English affects Marathi [Nemade \(1990\)](#). The famous Marathi novelist and academic Nemade examines English's influence on language and culture. Nemade recounts how Marathi-speaking Maharashtra adopted English. His research analyses how British colonialism and Indian industrialization impacted the use of English in India. Nemade then examines Marathi-English sentence and word integration. English has undermined Marathi culture and identity, the book claims. The individual fears English's development in education, literature, and speech would marginalise Marathi. The study of linguistic imperialism began with [Phillipson \(1992\)](#). The study reveals how English impacts European languages. This research called English the "Killer Language" of empire and control. Linguistic imperialism studies why some languages rule and tries to conceptualise. British, French, Japanese, and other empires' language policies, the imposition of European languages on continents, often to the detriment of local languages, and the current role of colonially introduced languages in Africa and Asia in promoting international communication and national unity are all clear signs of linguistic imperialism [Rahman \(1996\)](#). Imperialism transformed Indian languages. Some studies define linguistic imperialism as one language's dominance, elitism, and superiority over another. Orientalist policies supported Indian Classical languages to safeguard national intellectuals and cultural elites, according to recent research. [Mallikarjun \(2008\)](#) favours native languages. Mallikarjun advises against multilingualism and linguistic supremacy damaging indigenous languages. Mallikarjun stated language loss persists. Language loss does not affect science or IQ. Author illustrates humans are sloppy with languages. We disregard our threats. This research covers Indian indigenous language minority. The author covers Indian multilingualism and language erosion. Crystal says languages may die, says Mallikarjun. Crystal investigates status, genocide, linguicide, calamities, and displacement. Mallikarjun characterises linguistic endangerment as Krauss' Moribund, Endangered, and Safe. Mallikarjun studies Sanskrit decline. Mallikarjun said linguistic change, negativity, and English, French, Arabic, and Chinese supremacy affected Sanskrit most. [Neog \(2008\)](#) examines Assamese language concerns. Assamese dropped when English became the educational language. Maintaining language and culture requires renewal. The book discusses Assamese revival. Neog promotes Assamese literature and culture. Neog meticulously collected Assamese songs, tales, and rituals after investigating language-culture links. He protected Assamese culture, self-respect, and creativity. Its scientific approach and plain presentation have garnered the book

praise. Neog advocated Assamese culture and language preservation. The strategy promoted language revival research. [Dastgoshadeh and Jalilzadeh \(2011\)](#) recommend language preservation for identification. Language diversity and international diplomacy suffer from English globalisation. Language decline lowers self-esteem, study finds. Language and identity loss require global communication. By preserving one's native tongue, learning English as a global language fosters social progress, modernity, and cultural identity, according to research. Independence and global fame are EIL aspirations. Protecting language and identity is vital.

2. RATIONALE AND AIMS OF THE STUDY

An analysis of the literature study reveals that there has been a limited amount of research undertaken so far on the Assamese language in perspective of Linguistic Imperialism. Thus, the researchers aim to define two consequences/phenomena occurring in language as a result of linguistic imperialism.

This research article specifically examines the sociolinguistic dimensions of Linguistic Imperialism. The research paper aims to study the following occurrences:

- To explore the phenomenon of Semantic Nullification and portray its presence in the Indian languages as an effect of Imperialism.
- To find out the phenomenon of Phonetic Ambiguity and illustrate its occurrence within the Indian languages.

3. METHODOLOGY

This research follows the descriptive survey method and data has been collected from primary and secondary sources. Fieldwork in state of Assam has yielded the study's primary data. Fieldwork has been conducted based on situations across all the possible platforms of language usage such as political meetings, educational institutes, social community functions, public places and so on. Secondary data has been collected from the literary and linguistic works on the Assamese language and the topic genre which are relevant to the research topic.

3.1. SEMANTIC NULLIFICATION

Semantic Nullification can be defined as the phenomenon where due to the use of anglicized pronunciations and spellings for native language words and phrases for using it in English, the meaning of a word or phrase changes to null, i.e. the pronunciation of spelling changes to such a position which is totally something alien to the native language, thus it provides no meaning semantically. As a result, cultural concepts and practices unique to indigenous communities are lost, leading to a homogenization of cultures. This phenomenon can be traced in the following examples:

#1

/zurhat/

/zur/ + /hat/

Couple + Market

“Coupled Market”



/zorhat/ (Jorhat)

(No meaning in Assamese)

/zurhat/ is the name of a place in Assam. The word /zurhat/ in Assamese language is a compound word containing two words /zur/ & /hat/ which means 'couple' & 'market' respectively. Hence the word /zurhat/ means a place with a coupled market. Hence the name of the place was given as /zurhat/ as it contained a coupled market in both the banks of the river Bhugdoi. But in anglicised pronunciation and spelling, it is used as /zorhat/, but there is no meaning for the word /zor/ in Assamese. Therefore, when it is used as /zorhat/, it does not provide the meaning of a coupled market, infact the meaning of the word gets nullified since no meaning is established by the word.

#2

/bokul/	→	/bokel/ (Bokel)
"Name of a Flower"		(No meaning in Assamese)

/bokul/ is the name of a flower in Assamese language. There is a place in Assam called /bokul/ named after this flower as this place have lots of /bokul/ flower trees. During the British rule in Assam, the pronunciation and spelling of /bokul/ was changed to 'Bokel' as the britishers were not familiar with the pronunciation of /bokul/. Hence the beautiful flower name word changed to a word which actually has no meaning in Assamese language.

#3

Vishakhapatnam	→	/vaizeg/ (Vizag)
/bis ^h ak ^h a/ + /patnam/		(No meaning in Telugu)
Vishakha + Land		
"Land of Vishakha"		

/vishakhapatnam/ is the name of a place in South India. The word /vishakhapatnam/ in Telugu language is a compound word containing two words /bis^hak^ha/ & /patnam/ which means 'Vishakha'(Name of a Deity) & 'Land' respectively. Hence the word /vishakhapatnam/ means a place named after the name of a deity or a place belonging to a deity. Hence the name of the place was given as /vishakhapatnam/. But in anglicised pronunciation and spelling, it is used as /vizag/, but there is no meaning for the word /vizag/ in Telugu. Therefore, when it is used as /vizag/, it does not provide the meaning it actually meant for, infact the meaning of the word gets nullified since no meaning is established by the word.

#4

Thiruvananthapuram	→	/trivendram/ (Trivandrum)
/t ^h iruvananth ^h ɔ/ + /puram/		(No meaning in Malayalam)
Thiruvanantha + City		
"City of Thiruvanantha"		

/thiruvananthapuram/ is the name of a place in South India. The word /thiruvananthapuram/ in Malayalam language is a compound word containing two words /t^hiruvananth^hɔ/ & /puram/ which means 'Thiruvanantha'(Name of a Deity) & 'City' respectively. Hence the word /thiruvananthapuram/ means a place named after the name of a deity or a place belonging to a deity. Hence the name of the place was given as /thiruvananthapuram/. But in anglicised pronunciation and spelling, it is used as /trivandrum/, but there is no meaning for the word /trivandrum/ in

Malayalam. Therefore, when it is used as /trivandrum/, it does not provide the meaning it actually meant for, infact the meaning of the word gets nullified since no meaning is established by the word.

#5

Thakur	→	/tegɔ:r/ (Tagore)
/tʰakur/		(No meaning in Bengali)
Your Honour		

“Respected person of a village”

/thakur/ is a honorary title in Bengali language. The word /thakur/ in Bengali language is used as a salutation for addressing a respected person of a village. But in anglicised pronunciation and spelling, it is used as /tagore/, but there is no meaning for the word /tagore/ in Bengali. Therefore, when it is used as /tagore/, it does not provide the meaning it actually meant for, infact the meaning of the word gets nullified since no meaning is established by the word.

#6

Hondikoi	→	/hendik/ (Handique)
/hɔndi/ + /koi/		(No meaning in Assamese)
to bridge + person		
“Liaison”		

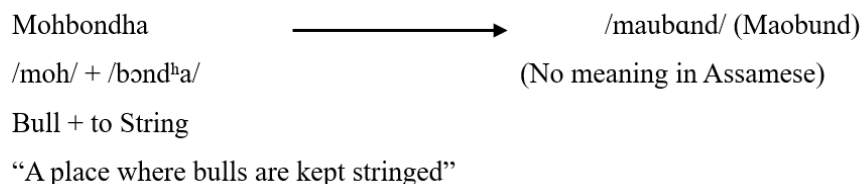
/hondikoi/ is surname of a used in the Assamese community. The word /hondikoi/ in Assamese language is a compound word containing two words /hɔndi/ & /koi/ which means ‘To bridge’ & ‘Person’ respectively. Hence the word /hondikoi/ means a person who acts as a mediator or bridge between two parties or groups. But in anglicised pronunciation and spelling, it is used as /handique/, but there is no meaning for the word /handique/ in Assamese. Therefore, when it is used as /handique/, it does not provide the meaning it actually meant for, infact the meaning of the word gets nullified since no meaning is established by the word.

#7

Bengaluru	→	/bengalo: r/ (Bangalore)
/benga/ + /luru/		(No meaning in Kannada)
Benga + City		
“City of Guards”		

/bengaluru/ is the name of a place in Karnataka, India. The word /bengaluru/ in Kannada language is a compound word containing two words /benga/ & /luru/ which means ‘Benga’ (Name of a Deity) & ‘City’ respectively. Hence the word /bengaluru/ means a place named after the name of a deity or a place belonging to a deity. Hence the name of the place was given as /bengaluru/. But in anglicised pronunciation and spelling, it is used as /bangalore/, but there is no meaning for the word /lore/ in Malayalam. Therefore, when it is used as /bangalore/, it does not provide the meaning it actually meant for, infact the meaning of the word gets nullified since no meaning is established by the word.

#8

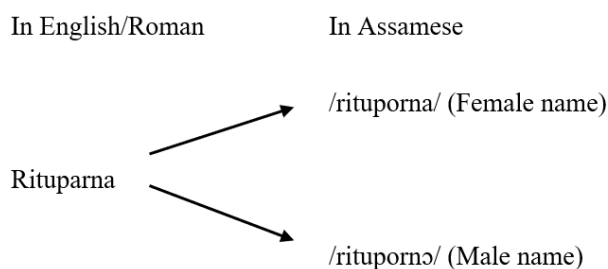


/mohbondha/ is the name of a place in Assam, India. The word /mohbondha/ in Assamese language is a compound word containing two words /moh/ & /bɔndʰa/ which means ‘Bull’ & ‘To string’ respectively. Hence the word /mohbondha/ means a place where bulls are kept stringed. Hence the name of the place was given as /mohbondha/. But in anglicised pronunciation and spelling, it is used as /maobund/, but there is no meaning for the word /maobund/ in Assamese. Therefore, when it is used as /maobund/, it does not provide the meaning it actually meant for, infact the meaning of the word gets nullified since no meaning is established by the word.

3.2. PHONETIC AMBIGUITY

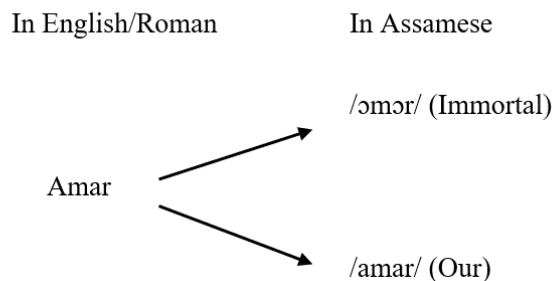
Another consequence of linguistic imperialism is phonetic ambiguity, where unique sounds and pronunciation in indigenous languages are lost. The imposition of dominant languages leads to the loss of unique sounds and pronunciation, which are essential to the cultural identity of indigenous communities. Phonetic Ambiguity can be defined as the phenomenon where due to the use of English/Roman script for writing in a language creates a ambiguity in the fine unique pronunciation hierarchy of that language. For example,

#1



The naming words /rituporna/ & /rituporno/ in Assamese language are female & male name respectively. But when it is written in English/Roman script, it is written as ‘Rituparna’ for both the gender. Hence creating an ambiguity in deciding whether the word is denoting a male or a female identity.

#2



The words /ɔmɔr/ & /amar/ are two different words with a totally different meaning in Assamese language. The word /ɔmɔr/ means 'immortal' and the word /amar/ means 'our' in Assamese. But when it is written in English/Roman script, it is written a 'Amar' for both the aforementioned words. Hence it creates a ambiguity for the reader in deciding the meaning of the word.

4. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, linguistic imperialism has far-reaching consequences on indigenous communities, leading to the loss of cultural identity and linguistic diversity. Semantic nullification and phonetic ambiguity are two of the most significant consequences of linguistic imperialism. The preservation of indigenous languages is crucial to promoting cultural diversity and understanding. Therefore, it is essential to recognize the importance of linguistic diversity and work towards preserving indigenous languages. As language imperialism continues to expand, it is important to be aware of the potential impacts of this phenomenon and to consider the potential harms that it can bring to minority communities. It is only through understanding the implications of language imperialism and its effects on linguistic diversity that we can work towards a more equitable society where everyone has access to the same linguistic resources to express themselves in ways that affirm their identity and culture.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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