



Construction Of Identity: Role Of Dialects In Identity Formation In Eastern And Western Varieties Of Assam

Henna Das

Research Scholar

School of Language, Literature and Cultural Studies

Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi, India

Abstract: Identity formation has a profound and interconnected relationship with dialects, shaping how individuals perceive themselves and how they are perceived within their communities. The main purpose of this paper is to give an overview of the Eastern and Western varieties and dialects spoken in Assam, and how these dialects reflect their identity. It's been an overhauling debate since eternity about what attributes to an individual's identity, whether it be language or facets of language like dialects, religion culture attire, etc. These are all in one perspective termed to be personal markers of the identity of an individual. We will take one of the facts of identifiers, i.e., dialect under one language and the ways people identify and attribute themselves to a dialect and match it up with their self-esteem. All these dialects and varieties are claims from the group of presumed recognition.

Index Terms - Language, Identity, Dialect

Introduction

The word identity originates from the Latin term "idem," signifying that all individuals share commonalities but are not identical. Rooted in human and social demography, identity serves as a fundamental means through which humans comprehend themselves. Consequently, attempting to encapsulate the intricate relationship between identity and humanity within a single article proves challenging. Hence, it would be more appropriate to focus on delving into the connection between dialect and identity, ensuring a more comprehensive exploration of this intricate interplay.

The identity attributed to the language, dialect and its varieties is more like recognition of the place and subjectivity an individual belongs to. This is to be termed linguistic ethnography, which means that this language and dialect will be used as an identifier in the modern world regarding cultural differences and narrowing down to an individual's identity. Other than gender, caste or religion, there is self-representation of individuals, which comes with the dialect and the language they attribute to, and they feel attached to and

grounded. If we narrow down the language and identity relationship, idiolect plays a vital role. Idiolect is basically the accent and dialect adopted by a group of people, giving themselves an identity with a uniqueness to the core and a sense of recognition and owning that particular idiolect. The idiolect of an individual gives him a recognition of identity from a particular group, ethnicity, culture, social class, etc. This could be based on occupations, religions, jargon, etc.

The study of dialects is essential in exploring the varieties of a language and the changes that occur in a language. A dialect or linguistic variant is characterised by differences related to factors such as ethnic groups, individuals, locations, and gender. It serves as the language used by a specific area, class, district, or group. Variations in dialect encompass alterations in pronunciation, sounds, spelling, and grammar, resulting in the development of distinct linguistic varieties or dialects.

Dialects and Identity Formation

Language happens to be the best way to communicate, connect and address emotions all over the world. Language gives users agreement and convention through their usage and meaning. These are not the only facets of language; it's way more than this. The identity linkage of language along with different varieties all over the world is uncountable, which rises to the summary of a number of varieties under the bigger head of any language which gives an identity to a group of people, community or society from where they belong to.

Different dialects in a language are one of the ways to protect, spread, and recognise their culture and tradition wherever they go or are. This provides them with distinctiveness and an identity from others. It shares a sense of attachment with the roots and forefathers. They feel connected with their land and masses wherever they go if they get recognised or identified because of their language and dialect. There is no measurement of sub-standard or standard in dialects. None of the dialects is superior to one another. Rather, what it recites is belonging to a particular group, togetherness, place and community. Basically, it gives identity to any individual from where that individual belongs to. This recognition and identity that an individual proudly owns seems to be the flag bearer of their culture and tradition.

For example, people from Birmingham have different accents, and people from other parts of the same country have different accents. Referring to the series Peaky Blinders, one can differentiate how the pronunciations and dialects are different in the same country, and they have become identifiers of the part you belong to. This is how the dialect of the place becomes the identity of the group of people who speak the same kind of language with the same dialect. It becomes very easy for them to sense the brotherhood among themselves wherever they go. They identify their own community as soon as they start talking; the only identifier here is the dialect and their understanding.

People from the Assamese language also have a number of regional varieties. It is called regional variety when a language takes on variances or differences in distinct areas or localities. George Abraham Grierson originally discussed the regional varieties of the Assamese language in his book, "Linguistic Survey of India". Following him, Banikanta Kakati (1941) divided the varieties into two major groups: 1) Eastern Assamese and 2) Western Assamese. Following him, one comes to know that the Eastern dialects range from the lower part of Sadiya to Guwahati, with a degree of homogeneity, and they are very similar to the Sibsagar variety. The western dialect was divided into Kamrupi and Goalpariya dialect which includes some local regional dialects. People belonging to the eastern part of Assam are considered the standard variety, but as soon as we move to the western part of Assam, the dialects they speak are not homogeneous with the eastern variety. However, the people from the Kamrupi variety spoken in places such as Barpeta, Nalbari, and Palasbari may not always be mutually intelligible among the varieties. Similarly, when we move towards Eastern and Western Goalpara, we can observe that the dialect starts to change. This is all over the globe, which gives a sense of identity to the people from which part or region of the state they are from.

Therefore, dialect and identity go hand in glove. People have always thought that their traditions, culture and dialect are superior to others. But the reality is that the identity and dialect of any language give people recognition of their region, which is misunderstood with the egoistic reel world wherein community rate their dialect over others. But there is no second doubt or debate on this that dialect has a direct linkage with identity. There is no means to say that dialect is not linked to the dialect spoken by any community recognised by the group of people. But there has also been a debate that when a small community has a different or unique dialect until they get recognition from the other communities, they are not termed as a variety or variation. Rather, it is termed a self-proclaimed variety. But still, there is one theory which says that the self-proclaimed, also as spoken by a community, is the identity of that community. It depends on the individual who knows the dialect and language and is able to recognise the dialect. This notion states that the identity is directly connected to the dialect.

Conclusion

It is pertinent to note that it is needless to say that dialect is a recognition of an individual or a community when it comes to identifying and differentiating it from others. It is very similar to how a community or individual cherish their culture or tradition; similarly, people hail their dialect and variety of languages. Some languages and dialects are becoming extinct because people have stopped using their dialect or variety as constructors of their identity. Therefore, it is advisable to keep their identity alive by using their dialect to recognise their region and regional language. A dialect is a way to get identified at every place and accepted in the part of the nation where they belong. It becomes a way to build solidarity among the members of the community, creating a sense of togetherness and a collective identity. It comes from historical and generational connections with the community, defined by several factors, and dialect is one of the essential components. The continuous and generational usage of dialects keeps the regional culture alive and builds a distinctive collective identity for all the members of the community.

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