

## Causes of Decline of Yadgha Language

### LES CAUSES DE DECLIN DE LANGUE DE YADGHA

Fauzia Janjua<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** Language is not an autocrat, its existence is dependent upon the community members who speak and own it. My study concerns questions and implications with regard to the sociolinguistic status of the Yadgha speakers inhabiting Lutkoh valley, on the north western side of Chitral. Theory adopted for the study is that language decline not only affects the indigenous communities but also decrease the knowledge pool in general. To develop a viable framework, I tested linguistic variations through observations and data collected from the community itself. The primary objective of the study was to investigate into the evidence of linguistic vitality of Yadgha and the factors involved in the loss of Yadgha language in Lutkoh valley. All the residents of Lutkoh valley comprised the population of the study. Random sampling technique was used for data collection. Data was collected using Observations, Interviews, Questionnaires, Wordlists and texts. Data collected through these research tools was analyzed quantitatively by calculating the percent response. The study led to the findings that Yadgha language is one of the endangered languages of North Pakistan and the prominent factors involved in the process of its declination are: The economic status of the community, societal bilingualism and multilingualism, attitudinal changes among the speakers and national and global languages as pressure documents.

**Key words:** Yadgha; Decline; Language Loss; Language Prestige; Linguistic Attitude; Linguistic Choices

**Résumé:** La langue n'est pas un autocrate, son existence dépend de membre de la Communauté qui la parlent et possèdent. Mon étude concerne des questions et de simplifications en ce qui concerne le statut sociolinguistique des orateurs de Yadg hahabitant la vallée de Lutkoh, du côté occidental du nord de Chitral. La théorie adoptée pour l'étude est le déclin de langue affecte non seulement les communautés indigènes mais diminue également la piscine de la connaissance en général. Pour développer un cadre viable, j'ai examiné des variations linguistiques par des observations et des données rassemblées de la communauté elle-même. Le premier objectif de l'étude était d'étudier dans les preuves de la vitalité la nguisticde Yadgha et des facteurs impliqués dans la perte de langue de Yadgha en vallée de Lutkoh. Tous les résidents de vallée de Lutkoh ont comporté la population de l'étude. La technique d'échantillonnage aléatoire a été employée pour la collecte de données. Des données ont été rassemblées utilisant des observations, des entrevues, des questionnaires, des listes de mots et des textes. Des données rassemblées par ces outils de recherches ont été analysées quantitativement en calculant la réponse de pour cent. L'étude menée aux résultats que la langue de Yadgha est l'une des langues mises en danger du Pakistan du nord et des facteurs importants impliqués en cours de sa déclinaisons ont : Le statut économique de la communauté, le bilinguisme et le multilinguisme social, les changements attitudinaux parmi les haut-parleurs et les langues nationales et globales comme documents de pression.

**Mots clés:** Yadgha; Déclin; Disparition des langues; Prestige de la langue; Attitude linguistique; Choix linguistiques

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The loss of a language is like the loss of a cherished museum or library; a language bears in its lexical and semantic features, in its ways of saying things, a significant measure of the civilization of its speakers. The spread of few dominant languages and the disappearance of many indigenous languages is a worldwide phenomenon. There are close to seven thousand languages currently spoken in the world. Optimists estimate that in this century, 15% of the world's languages

<sup>1</sup> Ph.D, Assistant Professor, International Islamic University, Islamabad, Pakistan

E-mail: [Fouzia.janjua@iiu.edu.pk](mailto:Fouzia.janjua@iiu.edu.pk)

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will become extinct; pessimists estimate that 75% to 90% will die during this century. Around 70 languages are listed for Pakistan. A few of these are already extinct. Others are very much subject to extinction. (L.G.Baart, 2003)

Globalization of culture is endangerment to indigenous languages across the world. In 1995 an International Clearing House for Endangered Languages was inaugurated at the University of Tokyo. The same year, an Endangered Languages fund was instituted in USA. The opening statement by the Fund's committee was: Languages have died off throughout history, but never have we faced the massive extinction that is threatening the world right now; to say that a language is dead is like saying that a person is dead. It could be no other way for languages have no existence without people. A language dies when nobody speaks it any more (Crystal David, 2000). Crystal is of the view that several communities are losing their languages but we don't know at what rate. He also said that a language is dead when there is only one speaker left, with no number of younger generations interested in learning it.

Nicholas Ostler (Nicholas Oster, 1997) says, 'we, then, and our own children, appear to live at the catastrophic inflexion point, where all together, for most languages in the world, the decline in speaker numbers reaches the zero point.' It is evident that languages do die but how they die also is a question.

Loss of language is not the loss of a concept, an abstraction, but rather it is what happens when people change their behavior and stop transmitting their language. It is intimately connected with people and it cannot be treated simply as an intellectual puzzle to be solved (Mari Rhydwen, 1998). Living languages always borrow from their neighboring languages and a diachronic type of change is inevitable. But it takes decades to change its state. Sometimes the speed of change is very rapid as in the cases of Kalasha and Palula in Chitral and Damaki in Hunza. Crystal (2000, P.23) says, "Sometimes, the speed of change can be dramatic indeed, resulting in a rapid and abrupt shift with very little linguistic interference-what has been called 'catastrophic' or 'radical' shift".

Languages not passed on to the younger generation will eventually die out. Nettle and Romaine says (Daniel Nettle and Suzanne Romaine, 2000), 'A language is not a self-sustaining entity. It can only exist where there is a community to speak and transmit it. A community of people can exist only where there is a viable environment for them to live in, and a means of making a living. Where communities cannot thrive, their languages are in danger. When languages lose their speakers, they die.' Sometimes languages are murdered like Irish by English, but some people say that Irish committed suicide.

Language choices are influenced consciously or unconsciously, by social changes that disrupt the community. Accessibility to urban areas, need to use lingua franca; causing bilingualism and multilingualism, materialistic attitude, adoption of modernized life styles, individual independence, weak internal identity and negative status conferred either from the outsiders or by the community itself are the major factors responsible for indigenous language decline further extending to language loss.

The primary objective of the study was to investigate the state of Yadgha language in Chitral, North Pakistan. The study is a kind of detection strategy of the sociolinguistics of the community under study and in this way it will be of interest and importance for the organizations working for the development of policies to empower communities in social and economic sense, reflective of the language of those people. Respect for languages will lead towards better language policies and it is hoped that this study will be useful for the policy makers. It will contribute towards the strategic development for the survival of cultural heritage, especially in Pakistan. The study will be a unique contribution towards the linguistic studies of Pakistan in specific and towards those of the world in general.

## **2. METHODOLOGY AND ANALYSIS OF DATA**

The research was based on pure survey techniques. Yadgha speaking villages of Lutkoh valley were visited during the summers of 2003 and 2004. All residents of Lutkoh valley comprised the population of the study. Random sampling (Louis Cohen, Lawrence Manion and Keith Morrison, 2003) technique was used for data collection and twenty seven respondents were selected. 22.22% respondents were from the age group 18-20, 29.62% respondents were from the age group 20-45, 26% from 45-60 years of age, 11.11% respondents 60-70 years old and 11.11% were 70 and above. All age groups were included in order to formulate reliable results of the research work.

Data was collected through observations, wordlist collection, text collection, interviews and questionnaires. Observation tool was used to record the attitudes, condition, interests, opinions and insights into the complex realities of the population. Closed form questionnaires were used to get the opinion of the speakers. Interviews were used as another research tool so that a greater number of respondents be met and heard clearly. Wordlists and texts were used for comparison of Yadgha language with Khovar language, which is enjoying the status of lingua franca in Chitral and is supposed to be a direct source of stress for Yadgha language. Standard list of 210 words was jotted down to formulate a wordlist that constituted various classes of Nouns, adjectives, verbs and numerals. 07 respondents from Lutkoh valley filled the wordlist. Comparative analysis was made by first of all writing the phonetic transcription of the respondents' response. Words were listened three to four times and then transcribed in written form to draw comparison accurately.

Lists of words of Yadgha and Khowar languages were compared pair by pair. Phonetic similarity was drawn by comparing the word sounds of one language with the other. Then lexical similarity was found out by comparing words of the one language with the words of the other language and it was noted down that how many percent words of one language are found in the other one. Similarly wordlists of the two languages were compared for Phonetic variability and those sounds were traced out which were not present in one language as compared to the other one. The comparison of these languages was meant to find out the influence of Khowar upon Yadgha in terms of language change process. Data collected was analyzed statistically by calculating percent responses.

## **2.1 Geographic Location of Yadgha Community**

The people who speak Yadgha live in the Lutkoh valley of western Chitral. These villages are located between Garam Chashma and Dorah Pass. The area is a very rugged region of Hindukush Mountains. Yadgha speakers live in Royee, Khughik, Gufti, Gohik, Ughuti, Birzeen, Ghushrak, Mushain and Irjiak villages of Lutkoh valley.

## **2.2 Population Distribution**

The census figure recorded by health division of Lutkoh valley in 1998 shows the population of Yadgha community in the valley as:

Royee	700
Khughik	150
Gufti	500
Gohik	100
Ughuti	300
Birzeen	700
Ghushiak	50
Mushain	70
Irjiak	400
Total	2970

Total population of Lutkoh valley is 22000, so we can say that Yadgha speakers are approximately 2% of the total population.

## **2.3 Historical Background of Yadgha Speakers**

A community above Garam Chashma speaks the Yadgha dialect. The history of the people is mostly shrouded in obscurity. Morgenstierne and Grjunberg (Decker, Kendall, 1992) wrote about Munji language and people. They considered Munjis and Yadghans as single entity on the basis of the evidence that the name of places to the north of Munjan valley shows the extension of Munji language to the present place of Yadgha community. The respondents were questioned to investigate the evidence of migration of the older generations of Yadgha community from Munjan and 85.18% respondents reported that they are permanent residents of Lutkoh valley, 7.4%, old residents aging above 70 years of ages reported that they migrated from Nooristan and almost ranging from same age groups, 7.4% reported of being migrated from Yumghan. The values of the responses show that the event of migration of the forefathers of Yadgha community is not very much evident. The same has been confirmed by Morgenstierne while supporting Biddulph, who reported that Yadgha people claim to have migrated from the Munjan valley. Further when asked for the language of their grandfathers, 85.2 % respondents reported that their grandfathers spoke Yadgha before their conversion to Ismailism, 7.4% reported for Munji and 11.11% reported for Nooristani.

There are no written records about the history of Yadgha people; therefore the history recorded during the survey was based upon the verbal narrations of the events reported by linguistically Yadgha people during the course of interviews. By connecting the narrations of a group of more than ten old community members and that of the reportings of (Sultan-ul-Arafeen Sultan-ul-Arafeen, Muhammad, 1988) in his master's thesis from the University of Peshawar, the history of the tribe was shaped. It was reported that in 1895 when the Amir of Afghanistan, Sardar Abdur Rahman Khan, undertook the subjugation of the Kafirs who had maintained their independence and their ideology, against all the great Muslim conquerors of history including Tamerlane. The red Kafirs were massacred and broken up, or made slaves for the use in the Amirs' Army. They were forcibly converted to Islam and their entire territory was incorporated into Afghanistan. The name of Kafiristan (the Land of Kafirs) was changed to Nooristan (the Land of Light). The Afghans now call them Nooristanis or Jaddidis; from "Jadidul Islam", an alternate name for Nooristan. A fairly large number of red Kafirs crossed over to Chitral and settled down in different areas, now known as Bashgalis. In the course of time they all embraced Islam and these converters in Chitral are now called the Sheikhs.

The people who claim to have migrated to Chitral are called Darwesh by caste. According to the Darwesh people their arrival in this area was due to Nasir Khisrow. Nasir Khisrow had adopted the Ismaili religion in 441 A.H. in Egypt. He also wrote "Wajhidin". He began to preach the Ismaili religion for which the theologians of Ahli-Sunnat condemned him. He was declared an infidel and the Muslim theologians wanted to kill him. He fled and was given asylum in Yumghan (Afghanistan) where he started preaching the Ismaili creed in the area. When Nasir Khisrow arrived at Garm Chashma, an ancestor of the Yadgha tribe, Syed Malak Jahan Shah, became his disciple. People said that Nasir Khisrow liked this language so much that he began to preach the Ismaili faith in this language to the people of Lutkoh. The other reason might be the practical approach of Nasir Khisrow towards his preaching of Ismaili creed by addressing the community in a language they use and own. Some of the respondents said that Nasir Khisrow taught this language to the people of Lutkoh valley and Syed Malik Jahan Shah came with him from Munjan. Whatever was the case, these people consider Yadgha a religious language of Ismaili sect. Nasir Khisrow himself went back but Syed Malik Jahan Shah stayed behind and his descendants began to grow and become a class of the same name. They are the preachers and patrons of the Ismaili sect. 100% respondents said that Nasir Khisrow came to this region with his disciple Syed Malik Jahan Shah and spent some years here in preaching the Ismaili faith. However Nasir Khisrow has not mentioned his visit to this region in his "Safarnaman". In the light of the reporting of 78% respondents and supported by 100% respondents, it can be safely said that Yadgha language has been here in this area for about a thousand years.

#### **2.4 Socio-economic Status of Yadgha Community**

It was reported by 100% respondents that Yadgha speakers are considered wild and backward in terms of education, economy and development. In response to the question of the economic means of the community, 33.33% of the respondents reported that their profession is farming, 7.40% reported that they are employed and 59.25% reported that their profession is trading. This proves that most of the community members are involved in trading. Trade of the community ranges from Lutkoh valley to Munjan, Afghanistan. Trade items constitute the local fruits that makes minimal amount of export to far off areas that is why poverty prevails in the area. Snow covers the area 8 months a year and trade along with all other activities stops. 33.33% of the farmers said that they grow crops, and this cultivation is for domestic use only, as the cultivated areas are not even enough to produce for the needs of a fairly large family. They are small pieces of land meant to cultivate smaller amount of vegetables and other types of food grains. Animal rearing is rare in the area because of the absence of pastures in these barren mountains. They have no government jobs and if found, are of the lower grades. 100% respondents reported that male members of the community migrate to big cities in winter season to make both ends meet. Those who are unable to move to big cities, at least move to the adjacent areas like Garam Chashma and Chitral city to make their livings where they mostly get themselves engaged in labour work. 18.51% respondents reported that they go to Chitral city, 37.03%, reported that they go to Garam Chashma, 7.4 % reported that they go to other big cities and 37.03 % reported for Afghanistan. 92.6% respondents reported that they use Khovar when they go out of their villages. Yadgha speakers have presumed that Yadgha is a hurdle in their economic development. They think that they can only move ahead only when they would learn the language spoken by those who are economically developed ones. This is the internal attitude developed through external forces. Poverty seems to be the external force, which has created an internal force of rejection, resulting in a negative attitude towards their language. Such an attitude develops when the speakers are oppressed ethno linguistically.

#### **2.5 Marriage Patterns**

According to Yadgha speakers, to integrate themselves in a bigger and better community, they want to be married in educated or at least Khovar speaking families. This is a practice for the last few years and they are bringing Khovar women into their homes for the sake of better grooming of their children. This practice is also bringing Khovar in place of Yadgha to their homes. On questioning about the marriage patterns, 74.07% respondents reported that people do marry outside the village. It was also reported that they prefer marrying Khovar speakers, as it is considered most prestigious language of the area. The value points towards language attitude and also towards the effect of migration in the form of intermarriages among the different language groups. Both girls and boys, prefer marrying Khovar speakers for the sake of prestige among peers.

#### **2.6 Education**

Agha Khan Education Foundation has set up primary schools in these villages but the economic conditions of the residents are not feasible to afford the fee structure, therefore literacy rate is very low. Few children attend schools, not a single female was found educated in Birzeen, Royee and Gufti. It was found out during survey that 62.96% population is illiterate, 3.7% primary, 11.11% metric, 11.11% intermediate, 7.4% graduate and 3.7% post graduate. School teachers are mostly Khovar speakers and they use to say to their students, "You cannot learn, if you are Lutkohwari (Yadgha) speakers", 90% teachers, even those who are Yadgha speakers, justified this statement by saying that Yadgha/Lutkohwari is a language that causes hindrances in the learning of other languages, especially Khovar and Urdu. 74.07 % respondents agreed that Yadgha creates inter-language errors while learning Khovar and Urdu. 90% Teachers in primary school

Birzeen reported in an interview that they had never talked in Yadgha with their students. They try to use English, as it is the medium of instruction, but they prefer using Urdu. Khowar is used as a last resort in the classrooms but is used the most outside the classrooms.

## **2.7 Linguistic Association**

Yadgha language belongs to Iranian group of languages which is a branch of Indo-Iranian languages. The author of "Tariekh-e-Chitral" has written about this language and class. He states that the dialect is derived from the Afghan and Persian languages. While Wazir Ali Shah, quoting Morgenstien, writes that it (Yadgha) was a language of Persia. Payne<sup>9</sup> described the languages of North-western valleys of Chitral as Indo-Iranian, South-east Iranian, Pamir languages. Morgenstien (Payne. J.R, 1987) also classifies Yadgha among the Pamir group of Indo-Iranian languages. He considers Yadgha and Munji as highly archaic. It was 1938 when he considered Yadgha antique and bygone but in the coming couple of years it seems to be a reality.

Yadgha language is also spoken in some villages of Munjan and Yumghan. The people of Munjan and Yumghan also belong to the Ismaili sect and send their offerings to the Agha Khan through the Ismaili Khalifah of the Yadgha people in Lutkoh. They form approximately 3% of the race that occupies Munjan on the Northern side of the Hindukush, and speak the language with certain variations of dialect from Yadgha language. Syed Mtaib Shah, one of the most prominent men of the Yadgha tribe and a religious leader (khalifah) of the Ismaili sect in Lutkoh, visited Munjan. He informed the researcher that this language was spoken in Munjan and Germ of Afghanistan. A question arises; "why is this language spoken in Munjan which is a long distance from Lutkoh"? This question is answered by 68% respondents who said that in the reign of Sultan Mahmood of Ghazni, some Afghan soldiers had settled down in Yumghan. This might be the reason of the presence of a dialect of Yadgha language in Munjan and Yumghan. In this way, the language reached the region, just as Persian reached Madaklasht after the migration of people from Badakhshan to Madaklasht.

No dialect variations were recorded during the survey of Yadgha language in Lutkoh valley. As a matter of fact those who were linguistically Yadgha speakers were not able to fill the wordlist confidently. They discussed the words with one another before coming up with a final word.

## **2.8 Language Vitality**

So far, minimal evidences of the vitality of Yadgha language were reported.

88.88% respondents reported that if provided an opportunity, they will not join classes to learn their language, 96.29% respondents reported that they will not send their children even. The response towards children was more rigid and strong. They do not want their children to learn their native language. Language maintenance can only be fostered when the speakers want to maintain their language, it can never be forced from outside. The attitudes of Yadgha speakers are so rigid towards language shift that they do not want to transmit their language to their children rather they want their children to learn Khowar which they think, would help them in future. 74.07% reported that there are people in their village who have stopped speaking Yadgha, whereas 100% respondents reported that they are proficient in Khowar language.

## **2.9 Linguistic Affiliation of Yadgha with Khowar**

When wordlists of 210 words of Yadgha and Khowar respectively were compared, it was seen that Yadgha and Khowar have only 6% Phonetic similarity. This means that the words, which are similar in sounds in Yadgha and Khowar both, are only 6%. The words which are present in both the languages and have same meanings are only 8%. It is proved that the differences regarding the sounds of the words of both languages are 4% of the total. This means that the two languages are phonologically 4% different from each other. The similarities and differences are not significant so we can say that the decline of Yadgha language is not a result of language change it might be due to some other factors.

Yadgha and Khowar languages when compared with each other through texts, shows 6% phonetic similarity, 8% words are similar in both the languages bearing the same meanings and these two languages vary 4% in sounds of the words, these values gave the same results as those of the wordlist comparison which proves that the two languages are not significantly similar to each other. They bear differences and the similarities, but very few. This can be easily assumed that the shift over of the natives from Yadgha to Khowar is not due to the similarities between the two but there might be other reasons for the shift. Khowar is lingua franca of Chitral but due to severe weather conditions upper Chitral valley remain isolated from the developed areas of the region for more than eight months a year. They communicate with Munji people of Afghanistan because of their trade relations and easy approach to Munjan. With the development plans of Agha Khan Foundation in Chitral, education came to the area but Yadgha speakers are still considered unable to speak Khowar with its correct pronunciation because they are not in a frequent need to speak Khowar language so they don't use it. The feeling of hesitation in speaking Khowar kept them in isolation and the borrowing is least from Khowar. Language change is brought about by the communication of speakers of different linguistic groups and if any of them, due to any reason stay

in isolation then there are almost no chances of borrowing, therefore the process of language change propagates at a very slow speed. Same is the case of Yadgha speakers, but the younger generation has now shifted over to Khowar without the process of language change. 92.6 % respondents reported that Khowar is the language understandable for all age groups of the valley. Only 7.4 % respondents reported that Yadgha is the language understandable for all age groups.

## **2.10 Attitudinal changes**

74.07% respondents responded that people are adopting the ways of other group. This shows that people are changing their life styles and they are moving ahead. Therefore it can be said that people are moving towards modernization. Modernization always has an attraction for the communities apart. Modernization brings economic opportunities which accelerate the wish to live a better and easy life. To fulfill their wish, people try to enter the race of modernization at the cost of their language and culture. They deliberately leave behind indigenous languages and cultures for the sake of a new way of life.

88.88% respondents reported that they are not speaking the language of their grandfathers. Bilingualism and multilingualism are the most effective factors affecting the indigenous languages. Pakistan is linguistically a multilingual country where people need to speak native, national and international languages at the same time. These factors are at work everywhere in Pakistan therefore their presence in Lutkoh valley is inevitable. 92.59% people of the area reported that they are bilingual in Khowar and multilingual in Urdu as well. Bilingualism in Khowar is the need of every individual of Lutkoh valley (either studying or doing something else), for the sake of inter-communication among the linguistic groups.

It was found that 66.66% people can speak Urdu but only 14.81% speaks it often but at the same time 51.85% find Urdu easy to speak and 44.44% can read Urdu. The medium of instruction in the schools is Urdu. Only one school is English medium there. But at the same time teachers and students both find Khowar easy for communicative purposes and they interacted well in Urdu during the survey. This proves that Urdu is affecting Yadgha and is contributing towards the loss of Yadgha directly because students are bound to learn Urdu as a language and as medium of instruction. only 7.40% of the respondents reported that they are able to speak English and only 3.70% reported that they often speak it, 3.70% reported that they find it easy to speak and 14.81% said that they can read it. This proves that English is not affecting Yadgha to a large extent. Therefore we can say that being an economically weak community they are far behind the international standards of life.

81.48% respondents said that they do not want Yadgha as the medium of instruction in schools. The question was meant to check the attitudes of natives towards their language. It is proved that no one is interested in Yadgha. This attitude might be the result of discrepancies felt by the natives for being left behind in education, then in jobs and in society overall. Yadgha speakers of Lutkoh valley are far behind in education. Literacy level is very low. Most of the community members are illiterate therefore not at good jobs and not living an easy life. Now they have developed a feeling that they must learn those languages and skills, which are of the developed group around them. Attitudinal changes are often reinforced externally. Economic condition of a community is always a strong factor in attitude formation of the individuals. When the people are suffering from poverty they can do anything to come out of that state of life. Yadgha speakers assume that by shifting on to Khowar, they can improve their economic condition therefore they have decided to shift their language. 88.88% respondents reported that their children would find better jobs by giving up Yadgha. This shows why they have developed negative attitude towards their language.

## **3. FINDINGS OF THE RESEARCH**

It was found out that the linguistic group under study belongs to a low prestige linguistic community and they are giving up their language to integrate themselves in a bigger community and to break the barrier between them and the high prestige group surrounding them. Urdu as a national language is contributing towards language loss in the region. English as a global language is contributing indirectly, as it bears top most position in language hierarchy and if it is not contributing directly, it would, as a part of language hierarchy be affecting too. Contribution of bilingualism and multilingualism towards the loss of all the language under study is significant. These two activities make the shift easy and work as a catalyst in the process of language shift. The economic status of the community is responsible for indigenous language loss; rather it is the strongest factor responsible for language shift in the area. It is proved from the results of data analysis that for the sake of moving on to a better economic status Yadghans are giving up their indigenous languages for the lingua franca of the area. People also believe that by giving up their languages they will get better jobs and better opportunities in life and their economic condition will probably improve.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The study led to the conclusion that the causes of decline of Yadgha language in Lutkoh valley are: The economic status of the community and power balance of the language in the area, National language as a pressure document, Indirect pressure of English as a global language, Modernization and access to better life style as the social right of every community, Societal bilingualism and multilingualism as catalysts of change, Education level of the community and above all the attitudinal changes in the native speakers' behaviour which are brought about by certain internal changes under the effect of external forces fostered by the social and political conditions prevailing in the area.

My study ended with a plea that something must be done for the cultural and historical loss of the precious heritage of the country.

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