

## **CHAPTER-III**

# **INTERPRETATION OF LINGUISTIC TERMS**

### **3.1 LINGUISTIC CHARACTERISTICS OF BENGALI:**

A language holds identity of the particular community. They represent the thoughts or ideas through communication among the members of the community. It is connected with the rituals, beliefs, customs or personal behaviours. It archives the history of a particular community. A language reflect the unique depiction of a community.

Hymes believes that ‘speech is so fundamental an activity of man, language so integral a part of his culture’ (1964:21). Language and culture influence one’s life perceptions. Culture is reflected and transmitted through language. Language is an important tool of communication which is shaped according to the social structure. It is influenced by social, geographical and cultural aspects. The structure of a language determines the world-view of a community.

Learning a language can also teach us about culture and the social structure of the society. It can help to develop intercultural communication skills which will broaden the perspectives of better understanding worldviews.

This paper studies the linguistic and ethnic diversity of the migrated couples. The exceptional linguistic diversity experienced by the fictional characters are exposed. Language is a tool of expressing views in a communication. It also implies ethnic or social-cultural identity. Migration is one of the reasons of multilingualism. The members of a community adopt the language of the new place along with their own native language. According to the Eight Schedule of the 92nd Constitutional Amendment (2003) recognizes a limited number of languages. Bengali is one of the scheduled languages of the constitution. The speakers of a language thrive for the identity of their community. In a multilingual setup, the pressure of dominant language may lead to identity crisis. The issue of assimilation in a multi-lingual region take place at a different interaction level. It displays the socio-cultural aspects along with ethnicity and linguistic features.

India has different scripts or languages for all its state (unions). English is being used as a medium of interstate and state-centre communications. Each state has its own language with its own script. Bengali is the official language of Calcutta which belongs to the Indo-Aryan language family. The Bengali community is one of the largest linguistic group of India. The Bengali language have their own script. The community resides in many parts of India such as West Bengal, Assam. They are also found in the neighbouring countries like Bangladesh.

Jhumpa Lahiri mostly plots her stories in Calcutta and America. Migrated couples of Calcutta struggles with the multilingual and multicultural aspects in America. Gauri, Subhash and Bela from 'The Lowland'. Ashoke, Ashima, Gogol and Sonia from 'The Namesake'. They are constantly in touch with other members of Indian origin to revive their shared cultural heritage. The Indian families organize various festivals to celebrate their socio-cultural integrity.

The purpose of the sociolinguistic assessment of the novels of Jhumpa Lahiri are stated below-

1. To investigate linguistic variation.
2. To determine attitudes of the characters towards their own language.
3. To measure the degree of intelligibility.

### **3.2 DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS:**

The first generation immigrants speak Bengali most of the time while addressing within the family or friends of Bengali community. The second generation mostly uses English though they can understand Bengali. They can understand each other and also have a cultural affinity among them.

- Use of Bengali kinship terminology among family and friends of Indian origin.

- Durga Puja is one of the important festival. They often try to revive the cultural essence of their state during the festival.
- They continue to consume their native Indian culinary.
- The use of ethnic attires is prevalent.
- The significance of mourning rituals for their loved ones.
- A unique form of celebrating birth rituals and birthdays organised every year.

These characteristics may have some changes due to the contact situation with various other communities. It is found that the second generation have some reformed cultural trait.

### **3.2.1 Demographic factors affecting language shift:**

- **Social integration-**

It is one of the reasons of language shift. Social isolation or frequent interaction may lead to it.

- **Size of a community-**

The size of a community determine the use of a language. The use of a language in a larger group can be well maintained. The social pressure influence to speak the ethnic language. Shift occurs in smaller groups.

- **Area-**

Language shift is more likely to occur in the urban areas.

The novels depict the language shift among the members of Bengali community due to migration. The reasons of migration are also stated as

- The author plots the issue of education in 'The Namesake'. Ashoke started to envision another sort of future. He decides to leave his native land and start a new life in Boston. He wanted to get over his fatal accident memories on his way to. Those

memories haunted him even in the new abode. He acquired a PhD in the field of fiber optics.

- Employment is another issue contrived in 'The Lowland'. Subhash wanted to pursue his education in United States. Subhash sought to go abroad where there were more jobs. He went to Rhode Island for PhD in marine chemistry.

### **3.3 LANGUAGE CONTACT:**

Interaction among speakers of different languages develop language contact situation. In a contact situation the communities while interaction tends to adopt some features from each other. Language contact situation may develop during contact with other language community and contact through media like television or radio programs.

Jhumpa Lahiri presents an intense language contact situation. Her novels represent how various languages have converged to create a cultural synthesis of its own kind. In such situation, language contact is a natural phenomenon. Language contact represents the influence of languages on each other. Multilingualism is one of the reason which involves speakers of different languages interact closely and it leads to influencing each other. It may occur due to migration.

Language contact may lead to the following situations:-

- Borrowing of vocabulary
- Adopting other linguistic features
- Language shift
- Creation of creole and pidgin.

The speakers which are mostly affected by language contact situation are the minority language speakers. The term 'minority' has been used in the context of number of speakers.

As the Bengali speakers are less in America, their close affiliation with English created the language contact situation.

Jhumpa portrays her characters socio-cultural affinity and the language contact situation in both her novels. Bengali language has come in contact with English. English as the dominant language of the region has an influence in it. As language is interesting in itself, the linguistic elements of the community in a contact situation is studied here. In the diversity of languages of the particular area thriving for linguistic identity is of great importance.

It is found that the characters of both the novels have gradually undergone language shift. Language shift is the situation when members of a community shifts to use a completely different language. It substitutes the roles and functions of the former language.

The novel 'The Namesake' shows the language shift. Gogol and Sonia as the second generation boy and girl have more socio-cultural affinity with the host country. The cultural and linguistic assimilation is more found among the second generation.

The novel 'The Lowland' displays the situation of assimilation and language shift. Gauri tries to find her identity in a foreign land by getting away from family and cultural heritage. As a second generation immigrants Bela and Meghna are alienated from their traditional heritage.

### **3.4 BILINGUALISM**

Bilingualism is about the ability to speak two languages. In both the novels, almost every member is a bilingual. They know their mother tongue and also their neighbouring language (Bengali and English). They use the English language while communicating with other people. As a result of prolonged language contact they can use it perfectly.

It depends on the situation where the mixing of elements of one language to the other. When two or more languages come in contact, the respective languages thrive for supremacy over other. So the minority language undergoes certain changes. The changes can be found among the second generation immigrants.

Phases of Multilingualism:

- Globalization that demands English.
- The media that influence through film industry, cartoons, news channels etc.
- Medium of instruction in Education system.
- Lingua-franca.

These phases led to multilingualism which is displayed in the novels of Jhumpa Lahiri. She depicts her characters as surrounded by various other speech communities.

### **The Namesake**

Ashoke tries to convince the principal of the elementary school that Gogol is perfectly bilingual. In order to prove that Gogol knows English, Ashoke does something he has never done before, and addresses his son in careful, accented English. Gogol perplexed of the new environment doesn't clearly reply to the questions. Another instance shows how Ashoke's family was astonished in the conversations of Gogol and Sonia during their visit to India.

### **The Lowland**

Gauri and Subhash raise Gauri in America. Gauri as a second generation immigrant uses the Bengali only in the home domain and English mostly.

Jhumpa Lahiri in both her novels shows the impact of bilingualism. Both the families of 'The Lowland' and 'The Namesake' retain their mother tongue in an English dominant country.

### **3.5 CODE-MIXING:**

Code-mixing is the situation where the speaker mixes words from a language while using some other language. Many linguists have tried to define it.

According to Mary W.J. Tay (1989:408), “Code-mixing involves the embedding or mixing of various linguistic units, i.e. morphemes, words, phrases and clauses from two distinct grammatical systems or sub-systems within the same sentence and same speech situation.”

Crystal (1997:66), *The Dictionary of Linguistics and Phonetics*, “defines code-mixing as a linguistic behaviour that “involves the transfer of linguistic elements from one language into another.”

Gumperz (1978) notes, “Code-mixing is a type of borrowing, where depending on various linguistic factors speakers borrow items of various sizes.”

Sridhar and Sridhar (1980), “The language that provides the grammatical structure into which elements are inserted is referred to as the host while the other is termed the guest language.”

Code-mixing is all about use of two or more languages at a time.

Sometimes code mixing is the addition of lexical items of a different language in some other language. It also holds the attitude of the language.

It involves two bilingual speaker mixing two different language while talking to each other. A few elements of one language is deliberately used in another language. It may happen unconsciously. It mainly occurs in a language contact situation which demands balancing of two or more languages.

#### **3.5.1 REASONS OF CODE MIXING:**

- It is used as a strategy of expression for an effective conversation.



- It may be due to inadequate vocabulary or for effective communication as a fluent speaker of the particular language.
- Sometimes it also develops from educational systems.
- It relates to the proficiency of language.

Code-mixing happens on particular contexts. It expresses that different situation make us use different code-mixed word. It is according to different mood. Different situation demand us to use code-mixed words because they plays an important role in it.

### **The Namesake**

- Ashoke uses English language to address Gogol in school but tries to use Bengali when he didn't response.
- Maxine's first visit to Gogol's house at Pemberton Road for lunch was remarkable. Ashima welcomed her with Indian traditions and customs. She prepared Indian food for her. Ashoke uses both English and Bengali in their conversations. "I'll miss you," Ashoke says. In Bengali he adds, "Remember to check in on your mother now and again." Ashima also adds in Bengali, "Call to let us know you've arrived there safely."

## **3.6 KINSHIP TERMINOLOGY:**

People use the language to communicate. Kinship terminology is the universal feature of languages. Kinship terminology is to identify relationships between individuals in a family. The classification of kinship relations are different among the communities. It is an important aspect in social organisation which develops the social cohesion. The Kinship system is

determined by age, sex, generation, blood and marriage. It specifies the relationship within the family. It is the catalogue of the names that are assigned to the relatives.

### The Namesake

BENGALI	ENGLISH
<i>Dida</i>	Grandmother
<i>Ma</i>	Mother
<i>Baba</i>	Father
<i>Didi</i>	Older sister
<i>Dadu</i>	Grandfather
<i>Mamu</i>	Maternal uncle
<i>Mashi</i>	Maternal aunt
<i>Dada</i>	Older brother
<i>Pishi</i>	Paternal aunt
<i>Maima</i>	Maternal aunt
<i>Kaku</i>	Paternal uncle(younger)
<i>Jethu</i>	Paternal uncle(elder)
<i>Mesho</i>	Maternal uncle

Table 1: kinship terminology

As the Gangulis were welcomed in the Dum Dum Airport by their relatives for a long vacation in India. They were swallowed by hugs and kisses and pinched cheeks and smiles. “There are endless names Gogol and Sonia must remember to say, not aunt this and uncle that but terms far more specific: mashi and pishi, mama and maima, kaku and jethu, to signify whether they are related on their mother’s or their father’s side, by marriage or by blood.” (The Namesake: P 81)

## The Lowland

BENGALI	ENGLISH
<i>Baba</i>	Father
<i>Ma</i>	Mother
<i>Dida</i>	Grandmother
<i>Mamoni</i>	Mother(affectionate)
<i>Memsahib</i>	Honorific term used by subordinates
<i>Dadu</i>	Grandfather
<i>Kaku</i>	Uncle
<i>Mama</i>	Maternal uncle
<i>Da</i>	Older brother

Table 2: Kinship Terminology

### 3.7 Bengali Terminology in ‘The Lowland’:

- Despite of integration with foreign culture and language, the use of Bengali terminology can still be found. Gauri exchanged views in Bengali with Dipankar Biswas, a Bengali student. Subhash and Udayan also wrote letters to each other in Bengali. Subhash’s last letter to Gauri asking for divorce was also in Bengali language.
- It was in English that the past was unilateral; in Bengali, the word for yesterday, kal, was also the word for tomorrow. In Bengali one needed an adjective, or relied on the tense of a verb, to distinguish what had already happened from what would be.

- In Hindu philosophy the three tenses- past, present, future- were said to exist simultaneously in God. God was timeless, but time was personified as the god of death.

Some of the instances using the Bengali vocabulary is stated below:

<b>Bengali</b>	<b>English</b>
<i>basanta kal</i>	Rainy season
<i>Kal</i>	Yesterday
<i>Shakal bela</i>	Morning
<i>Bikel bela</i>	Afternoon
<i>ratrir bela</i>	Night
<i>Dashima</i>	The tenth day
<i>Shashthi</i>	The sixth day
<i>Saptami</i>	The seventh day
<i>Ashtami</i>	The eighth day
<i>Navami</i>	The ninth day
<i>Pabda</i>	A kind of fish
<i>Lungi</i>	A garment wrapped around the waist by men
<i>Paanwallah</i>	Betel leaf seller
<i>Deshabrati</i>	Liberation
<i>Pather panchali</i>	Name of a movie which means the way of life
<i>Pabda</i>	A kind of fish
<i>Mejo sahib</i>	The second of three Nawab's brothers
<i>Kokil</i>	A cuckoo bird
<i>Durwan</i>	A porter or doorkeeper

Table 3: Bengali terminology in The Lowland

### 3.7.1. Names:

Jhumpa Lahiri used names of Bengali or Sanskrit origin. She used Indian names for her characters to show her Indian sensitivity.

The significance of the Indian names used by Jhumpa are given below:

Bengali/ Sanskrit	English
Bela	a span of time/ a portion of the day
Udayan	Sun, giver of life, receiving nothing in return
<i>Gauri</i>	It is a name of Goddess Parvati, wife of Lord Shiva
<i>Subhash</i>	Well spoken, eloquent
<i>Bijoli</i>	Lightning
<i>Meghna</i>	Cloud or river Ganges

Table 4: Bengali Names in the Lowland

### 3.8 Bengali Terminology in ‘The Namesake’:

- I. Ashima often realizes her error while referring to ‘fingers’ and ‘toes’. Ashima said to Patty, ‘As long as there are ten finger and ten toe’. This error pains her as English had been her subject. But she realized her mistake because in Bengali, a finger can also mean fingers, a toe toes.
- II. The Bengalis always used the phrase “I’m coming” instead of good-bye.
- III. On the final leg of Ganguli’s trip to India there are only a few non-Indians left on the plane. Bengali conversation fills the cabin; his mother already exchanged addresses with the family across the aisle.

IV. Ashoke assures Ashima that he'll be back in Bengali.

<b>Bengali</b>	<b>English</b>
<i>Buro</i>	Old man
<i>Daknaam</i>	Pet name
<i>Bhalonaam</i>	Good name
<i>Desh</i>	Country
<i>Piri</i>	A kind of tool
<i>Dal</i>	Lentils
<i>Cuticura</i>	Face powder
<i>Kabadi</i>	a kind of game
<i>Payesh</i>	A warm rice pudding
<i>Biryani</i>	A dish made of rice
<i>Luchis</i>	A deep-fried flatbread
<i>Rosogollas</i>	Sweet dish
<i>Chutney</i>	A spicy mixture of spices, sugar, fruit and vinegar
<i>Sandeshes</i>	A dish moulded out of saffron-tinted ricotta cheese
<i>Ajowan</i>	An annual plant with feathery leaves and white flowers, native to India.
<i>Chanachur</i>	An Indian snack mix which consists of a variable mixture of spicy.
<i>Rotis</i>	Bread, especially a flat round bread cooked on a griddle.

<i>Bindi</i>	A coloured dot worn in the middle of the forehead by Indian women, especially Hindus.
<i>Deshi</i>	A generic word for ‘countryman’ means ‘Indian’
<i>Sari</i>	A garment draped around the body.
<i>Ghat</i>	The edge of a river
<i>Annaprasan</i>	Rice ceremony
<i>Pradeep</i>	Light, shine

Table 5: Bengali terminology in The Namesake

### 3.8.1 Names:

<b>Bengali</b>	<b>English</b>
<i>Ashima</i>	One who is limitless, without borders
<i>Ashoke</i>	The name of an emperor, means “he who transcends grief”
<i>Nikhil</i>	He who is entire, encompassing all
<i>Moushumi</i>	Monsoon wind

Table 6: Bengali Names in the Namesake

## 3.9 LANGUAGE USE

Language is a process of expressing thoughts or experiences. It is one of the important parts of human communication. Language helps to establish the identity of a particular community. The use of language to manipulate personal identity through group identity. It is portrayed in linguistic through <sup>1</sup>Social Identity Theory developed by Henri Tajfel and his colleagues in 1970. The theory explains how an individual portrays his membership of a particular group

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<sup>1</sup> Social Identity Theory- Definition, History, & Facts. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.britannica.com/topic/social-identity-theory>

through language. A particular group of people sharing a language is known as the speech community.

Both the novels arise the issue language used. The situation and the domain demands variety of languages used in the multilingual context. The impact of the dominant language is one of the influential aspect. Language use is the use of a particular language in a multi-dimensional situation. The study involves the different domains of language used. The domains involved both formal and informal contexts. The domains used are:-

- Home
- Neighbourhood
- Market
- Workplace
- Education
- Religion
- Administration
- Mass media

1. Home: The choice of language used at home. The use of language for talking to the members of the family is an important aspect. Mother tongue is mostly used in this domain while talking to the members of the family. Bengali is mostly used in the home domain of the novels- 'The Namesake' and 'The Lowland'. But the reading and writing are mostly in English and the Television programmes are in English.

Example (The Namesake) - Ashoke never addresses Gogol in English. They use Bengali in home.

2. Neighbourhood: The lingua franca is English which helps them to communicate as the dominant language. They have friends of different linguistic community but uses the dominant language of the area.



3. Market: This domain involves the participation of various people of different community. It is an area where transaction and interaction among individuals involve. English is mostly used in this domain.

- Language used by the vendors of the market.
- Language used by the customers in the participation.

The vendors and customers are from various ethnic groups and during the conversations while transaction of goods the use of language is mostly the dominant language of the area. English in America. But in the Indian set up, the novels depict the use of Bengali and Hindi.

**The Namesake-** The salesman often direct their conversation to Gogol. As though his parents were either incompetent or deaf. Even the cashiers smirk at his parents' accents. Gogol is affected by such moments.

4. Workplace: It depends on the occupation a person is engaged to. English is used in both the novels

5. Education: This domain involves the language used for providing knowledge to the upcoming generation of the community.

First the medium of instruction of school is investigated. English is the medium of instruction. But the mother tongue was taught in informal domain.

**The Namesake-** Apart from the formal education, Gogol was also taught about Bengali culture and language. Ashoke and Ashima send him to Bengali language and culture lessons every Saturday. It was held in the home of one of their friends. Gogol was taught to read and write his ancestral alphabet. Bengali alphabets began with an unaspirated *K* which begins at the back of the throat. Then it marches steadily across the roof of his mouth, ending with elusive vowels that hover outside his lips. He is taught to write letters that hang from a bar, eventually to cobble these intricate shapes into his name. They read hand-outs written in

English about the Bengali Renaissance, and the revolutionary exploits of Subhas Chandra Bose. The children in the class study without interest, wishing they could be at ballet or softball practice instead. In Bengali class they read from hand-sewn primers brought back by their teacher from Calcutta. (The Namesake, Page: 66)

The phonology aspects of the Bengali language is discussed well in the novel.

#### 6. Religion: The use of language in the religious affairs.

This domain involves language used in-

- Personal prayers
- Rituals of the priests of the community
- Language used in holy books.

The rituals are cited in Bengali during the festivals or collective ceremonial activities.

The religious texts of the community is found in Bengali and their celebration of various ceremonies is conducted in their mother tongue. They have somehow maintained the heritage of their cultural aspects. The age old traditions are further carried for their identity.

7. Mass media: The language used in the mass media plays a vital role among the speech community. Programmes through TV or radio have a great impact on the lives of the members of the community. The programmes such as news, movies, music, drama, serials or special programmes about children can be used to invoke the cultural identity among them. Print media such as newspapers also plays an important role in it.

It is found that the characters of both the novels watch programmes and news in English. But there is a sense of reminiscence about the Bengali programmes.

The linguistic behaviour of a particular society depends on the socio-cultural and linguistic norms or traditions of the ethnic groups. In an area where various ethnic groups are in contact, there are various factors that forces for language contact, language maintenance,

code-mixing, language shift and so on. In a bilingual situation the ethnic group which is in a contact situation retains the use of their mother tongue and may take a partial rather than a total shift.

### **3.10 Language Proficiency:**

Language is a primary source of communication through which we can share ideas or thoughts. The use of a language is measured in language proficiency as the ability of an individual in a spontaneous interaction. It is closely related to the issues of fluency and language competence. There are different levels of determining language proficiency.

A multilingual situation demands the use of different languages for different functional needs. Various domains have differing importance depending on the situation.

- In multilingual situation of America, generally English is preferred language for communication due to the majority of English speakers nearby. It is the lingua franca among all other communities. English is learnt along with their mother tongue for wider communication as stated above.
- Bengali is preferred for communication at home domain and also among their community.
- English is used as medium of instruction in school.
- Bengali is used for religious purposes and prayers.

#### **The Namesake-**

Gogol ponders on certain awkward truths. For instance, although he can understand his mother tongue, and speak it fluently, he cannot read or write it with even modest proficiency.

Ashima often recalls about Bengali movies and actors. She is not much interested in the programmes sponsored in America.

Gogol as a bilingual child has more proficiency in English than his mother tongue. Whereas his mother Ashima is a homely character who reminisces her cultural heritage and language. She tries hard to gather all the Bengali couples and organise Indian festivals. The intergenerational gap and different language attitude is clearly visible.

Ashima and Ashoke is startled by the fact that their children sound just like Americans. They expertly converse in a language that still at times confounds them. They are not accustomed to the accents.

### **3.11 LANGUAGE ATTITUDE:**

Language is a form of behaviour through which thoughts or ideas are expressed. In a contact situation, different languages are used in various social situations. The use of the language reflects the attitude of its speakers. There are certain beliefs or attitude of the speakers towards the mother tongue or other languages. The use of their language and the desire to learn other languages determines the attitude of the speaker. The attitude of a community towards their mother tongue has an impact on the use of language.

In a multilingual situation the language attitude studies the language choice of speakers of a particular community. Besides their mother tongue, English language has its impact on the attitude of the speakers.

- The overall attitude of the Bengali characters of America in Jhumpa's novel towards their mother tongue is found to be positive among the first generation because the young ones are still taught to speak.
- The English language also has positive attitude due to its impact on it as a dominant language. It is effective for its globalized impact all over the world.

The media through movies, cartoons and other shows implies its influence.