



Economic Marginalization and Indigenous Ethnic Language Loss in Bangladesh

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ABSTRACT

Economic structures play a decisive role in shaping language use and linguistic sustainability among indigenous ethnic communities. In Bangladesh, indigenous language loss is closely associated with economic marginalization, labor market exclusion, and unequal access to educational and employment opportunities. This study examines the relationship between economic marginalization and indigenous ethnic language loss in Bangladesh, focusing on how economic pressures influence language shift and intergenerational transmission. Using a qualitative analytical approach based on existing empirical and socioeconomic studies, the paper analyzes patterns of language adaptation linked to employment, migration, and income insecurity. The findings indicate that economic necessity encourages dominant-language proficiency while reducing the functional value of indigenous languages in public and professional domains. As a result, language loss emerges not only as a cultural issue but also as a consequence of structural economic inequality. The study highlights the importance of integrating language-sensitive policies into economic development and education strategies to promote inclusive and sustainable growth.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Economic conditions play a central role in shaping language use, maintenance, and decline among indigenous ethnic communities. Language choice is often influenced by access to employment, income stability, and participation in formal economic systems. For indigenous communities, economic marginalization frequently encourages the adoption of dominant languages perceived as essential for survival and social mobility, while reducing the functional value of indigenous languages in everyday economic activities. As a result, language loss is closely intertwined with structural economic inequality rather than solely cultural change.

In Bangladesh, indigenous ethnic communities have historically faced economic disadvantages, including limited access to land, education, and formal employment. These inequalities shape linguistic behavior, as dominant languages become associated with economic opportunity and upward mobility ([Beg et al., 2020](#)). Indigenous languages, by contrast, are often confined to informal or domestic contexts, limiting their role in income-generating activities. This imbalance contributes to a gradual language shift, particularly among younger generations seeking economic integration.

Labor market participation has emerged as a significant driver of language change. Studies focusing on indigenous populations indicate that employment in urban centers and formal sectors requires proficiency in dominant languages, especially Bengali. As indigenous individuals migrate for work, they adapt linguistically to meet workplace demands, reducing opportunities for indigenous language use and transmission ([Uddin, 2017](#)). Over time, these adaptations produce measurable declines in indigenous language vitality.

Education functions as a critical mediator between the economy and language. Formal education systems prioritize dominant-language instruction, reinforcing the association between economic success and dominant-language proficiency. Indigenous students often internalize this hierarchy, perceiving their native languages as economically irrelevant ([Islam, 2020](#)). This perception influences household language choices, as parents encourage dominant-language use to improve their children's future employment prospects.

Economic marginalization also affects the intergenerational transmission of indigenous languages. Families facing income insecurity may prioritize dominant-language acquisition over indigenous language maintenance, viewing linguistic adaptation as a practical strategy for economic survival ([Ali et al., 2016](#)). These decisions, while rational at the household level, contribute cumulatively to community-wide language decline.

Socioeconomic exclusion further limits institutional support for indigenous languages. Limited representation of indigenous communities in policymaking and economic planning reduces opportunities for language-inclusive development initiatives. Research suggests that when indigenous languages lack visibility in economic and institutional contexts, their symbolic and practical value declines, reinforcing language shift ([Awal, 2019](#)).

Despite increasing recognition of indigenous language loss in Bangladesh, economic dimensions of language decline remain underexamined. Existing research often focuses on cultural identity or education, with less attention to how labor markets, income inequality, and economic policy shape linguistic outcomes ([Sultana, 2023](#)). Understanding language loss through an economic lens is essential for developing inclusive development strategies that address both linguistic and socioeconomic inequality.

This study addresses this gap by examining the relationship between economic marginalization and indigenous ethnic language loss in Bangladesh. By synthesizing existing socioeconomic and cultural research, the study highlights how economic pressures influence language use, transmission, and valuation. The analysis aims to contribute to discussions on

inclusive economic development, language sustainability, and social equity in multilingual societies.

2. METHODS

This study employed a qualitative analytical approach based on secondary data analysis to explore the relationship between economic marginalization and indigenous ethnic language loss in Bangladesh. The research design was appropriate given the study's focus on structural economic conditions, labor participation, and language behavior rather than quantitative modeling. All data were drawn exclusively from peer-reviewed academic sources included in the bibliographic list provided by the author.

The analysis focused on studies addressing indigenous livelihoods, labor market participation, socioeconomic inequality, and language use. Particular attention was given to research discussing employment patterns, migration, education, and household decision-making within indigenous communities (Ali *et al.*, 2016; Beg *et al.*, 2020; Uddin, 2017). These sources provided insight into how economic pressures shape linguistic adaptation.

A thematic synthesis method was applied to identify recurring patterns linking economic marginalization with language shift. Themes analyzed included dominant-language requirements in employment, economic incentives for language adaptation, and intergenerational language transmission under economic stress. Findings from multiple studies were compared to identify consistent relationships and contextual variation.

To ensure analytical rigor, only studies with clear socioeconomic relevance and empirical grounding were included. Cross-referencing among sources was conducted to minimize interpretive bias and enhance credibility. As the study relied solely on secondary sources and did not involve human participants, ethical approval was not required.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The synthesis of existing studies indicates that economic marginalization plays a decisive role in accelerating indigenous ethnic language loss in Bangladesh. Language use among indigenous communities is strongly shaped by access to employment, income security, and participation in formal economic systems. As dominant languages function as gateways to economic opportunity, indigenous languages increasingly lose their functional relevance in public and professional domains, contributing to systematic language shift (Beg *et al.*, 2020; Sultana, 2023).

One of the most prominent economic drivers of language loss is labor market exclusion. Research consistently shows that employment in both urban and rural formal sectors requires proficiency in Bengali, marginalizing indigenous language speakers who lack dominant-language skills (Uddin, 2017). As indigenous individuals migrate for work, linguistic adaptation becomes a survival strategy, leading to reduced use of indigenous languages in everyday communication. Over time, these patterns weaken community-wide language transmission.

Household economic insecurity further reinforces language shift. Families facing poverty or unstable income often prioritize dominant-language acquisition for children, viewing linguistic adaptation as essential for educational success and future employment (Ali *et al.*, 2016). While these decisions may improve individual economic prospects, they collectively contribute to declining intergenerational transmission of indigenous languages.

Education operates as a key intermediary between the economy and language. Formal education systems prioritize dominant-language instruction, reinforcing the association between economic mobility and dominant-language proficiency. Indigenous students frequently internalize the perception that their native languages hold little economic value, leading to decreased use within both school and household contexts (Islam, 2020). This dynamic accelerates language shift among younger generations.

The patterns in **Table 1** demonstrate that indigenous language loss is deeply embedded in economic structures rather than cultural disinterest. When economic participation depends on dominant-language proficiency, language shift becomes a rational response to structural constraints. This relationship highlights the role of economic inequality in shaping linguistic hierarchies.

Table 1. Economic Drivers of Indigenous Ethnic Language Loss in Bangladesh. The table was synthesized from references (Ali *et al.*, 2016; Beg *et al.*, 2020; Islam, 2020; Uddin, 2017).

Economic factor	Observed linguistic effect	Long-term implication
Labor market exclusion	Shift to the dominant language	Reduced indigenous language use
Income insecurity	Prioritization of the dominant language	Weak intergenerational transmission
Urban migration	Linguistic adaptation	Decline in community language domains
Education–employment linkage	Devaluation of the indigenous language	Accelerated language shift

Economic marginalization also limits institutional support for indigenous languages. Indigenous communities often lack representation in economic planning and policymaking, reducing opportunities for language-inclusive development initiatives (Awal, 2019). Without institutional recognition of indigenous languages in economic programs, their practical value remains limited, reinforcing language decline.

Gendered economic roles further influence language outcomes. Research suggests that women in indigenous households often act as primary caregivers and language transmitters. However, when economic pressures require women to engage in wage labor or adapt to dominant-language environments, opportunities for indigenous language transmission diminish (Ali *et al.*, 2016). These gendered dynamics contribute to uneven language loss across households and communities.

Table 2 highlights the reciprocal relationship between economic marginalization and language loss. As indigenous languages decline, communities lose cultural capital that could otherwise support social cohesion and alternative economic practices. Conversely, continued economic exclusion reinforces the perception that indigenous languages lack practical value.

Table 2. Socioeconomic Consequences of Indigenous Language Loss. The table was derived from references (Awal, 2019; Beg *et al.*, 2020; Sultana, 2023; Uddin, 2017).

Socioeconomic dimension	Community-level outcome	Individual-level outcome
Employment access	Unequal opportunities	Language-based exclusion
Educational attainment	Structural disadvantage	Reduced academic confidence
Social mobility	Limited upward mobility	Pressure to assimilate linguistically
Cultural capital	Erosion	Loss of indigenous linguistic assets

Overall, the findings suggest that indigenous ethnic language loss in Bangladesh is both a consequence and a driver of economic marginalization. Economic structures incentivize dominant-language use, while language decline further restricts access to economic opportunities. This cycle underscores the need to address language loss as part of broader strategies for inclusive economic development. Without integrating language-sensitive approaches into education and labor policy, economic inequality and linguistic marginalization are likely to persist in mutually reinforcing ways.

4. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that indigenous ethnic language loss in Bangladesh is closely intertwined with economic marginalization. The findings reveal that limited access to employment, income insecurity, and dominant-language requirements in education and labor markets significantly influence language shift among indigenous communities. As economic participation increasingly depends on dominant-language proficiency, indigenous languages lose their functional value in public and professional domains, weakening intergenerational transmission.

Economic pressures at the household level further accelerate language decline, as families prioritize dominant-language acquisition to improve educational and employment prospects. These individual decisions collectively contribute to community-wide language loss, reinforcing structural inequality. The results highlight that indigenous language loss is not merely a cultural issue but a consequence of broader economic exclusion. Addressing this challenge requires integrating language-sensitive approaches into education, labor, and development policies to promote inclusive economic participation and linguistic sustainability. Without such integration, economic marginalization and language decline are likely to continue reinforcing one another.

5. AUTHORS' NOTE

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article. Authors confirmed that the paper was free of plagiarism.

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