

Issues of Language Contact and Shift in Tai Ahom

Dipima Buragohain, dipimab@gmail.com

SEALS21, Kasetsart University, Bangkok

1. Tai languages are spoken largely in the Southeast Asian region.
2. People of the Tai Ahom community are scattered across Assam, northeast India, and more particularly in the districts of Upper Assam.
3. Current status of Tai Ahom is equal to an endangered language that is spoken merely by a few hundred people belonging to the priestly classes of the community.
4. Although not spoken in daily life, the use of Tai Ahom is limited to certain cultural functions and rituals celebrated by the community.
5. The language is culturally and historically significant. Apart from its ceremonial contexts, Tai Ahom is relevant as the history of ancient Assam is written and preserved in the Ahom writing script.
6. The development and use of Assamese language eventually resulted in the gradual and complete disappearance of Tai Ahom language.
7. Language shift from Ahom to Assamese includes several reasons:
 - a. Hinduization of the Ahoms
 - b. Acculturation among the Ahoms
 - c. Use of Assamese in both royal court and among common man
8. Issues of language contact and borrowings:
 - a. Cultural assimilation: Mutual interaction and admiration of local cultures
 - b. Linguistic assimilation: Assimilation of Ahom vocabulary into Assamese
9. Translation studies of Ahom manuscripts along with language learning and cultural study programs are widely encouraged.