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VARIATIONS IN LANGUAGE AND ITS EQUATION WITH LINGUISTIC IDENTITY

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Abstract

In this paper, we investigate the linguistic identity of the diasporic population in East Midnapur also known as (Purba Medinipur), which is a border district under the administration of the Indian state of West Bengal. This region of West Bengal has a long history of cultural and linguistic contact with the neighbouring state- Odisha, and a significant number of the Odia diasporic population has been residing here for many generations. Our study focuses on the linguistic behaviour of this diasporic community, who portrays both the forced and spontaneous instances of assimilation (Guy, 2011). The community identifies itself with the homogenous Bengali identity, even though their variety still retains Odia influence significantly. Keeping in mind this complex linguistic identity that Purba Medinipur residents have, our research explores the hegemony of Bangla and the survival of linguistic adherence of Odia in the variety of languages that these speakers use.

Keywords: identity, language, exhorted diaspora, variation studies

VARIACIONS EN LA LLENGUA I LA SEVA EQUACIÓ AMB LA IDENTITAT LINGÜÍSTICA

Resum

En aquest article, s'investiga la identitat lingüística de la població diaspòrica a l'est de Midnapur, també coneguda com a Purba Medinipur, que és un districte fronterer sota l'administració de l'estat indi de Bengala occidental. Aquesta regió té una llarga història de contacte cultural i lingüístic amb l'estat veí, Odisha, i un nombre significatiu de la població de la diàspora Odia ha viscut aquí durant moltes generacions. L'estudi se centra en el comportament lingüístic d'aquesta comunitat diaspòrica, que ofereix mostres d'assimilació forçades i espontànies (Guy 2011). La comunitat s'identifica amb la identitat bengalí homogènia, encara la seva identitat que encara conserva significativament la influència d'Odia. Tenint en compte aquesta complexa identitat lingüística que tenen els residents de Purba

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Medinipur, la investigació explora l'hegemonia del bengalí i la supervivència de l'adherència lingüística de Odia a la varietat d'idiomes que utilitzen aquests parlants.

Paraules clau: identitat, llengua, diàspora exhortada, estudis de variació

VARIACIONES EN LA LENGUA Y SU ECUACIÓN CON LA IDENTIDAD LINGÜÍSTICA

Resumen

En este artículo, se investiga la identidad lingüística de la población diaspórica en el este de Midnapur, también conocida como Purba Medinipur, que es un distrito fronterizo bajo la administración del estado indio de Bengala occidental. Esta región tiene una larga historia de contacto cultural lingüístico con el estado vecino, Odisha, y un número significativo de la población de la diáspora Odia ha residido aquí durante muchas generaciones. El estudio se centra en el comportamiento lingüístico de esta comunidad diaspórica, que retrata muestras de asimilación tanto forzadas como espontáneas (Guy 2011). La comunidad se identifica con la identidad bengalí homogénea, aunque su variedad aún conserva significativamente la influencia de Odia. Teniendo en cuenta esta compleja identidad lingüística que tienen los residentes de Purba Medinipur, la investigación explora la hegemonía del bengalí y la supervivencia de la adherencia lingüística de Odia en la variedad de idiomas que utilizan estos hablantes.

Palabras clave: identidad, lengua, diáspora exhortada, estudios de variación

1. Introduction

Language is a dynamic, unique, creative, complex, and modifiable entity (Labov 1966). The dynamicity of language is influenced by political, social, economic, geographical, and environmental factors, leading to the emergence of many different dialects and idiolects across various language families. These differences have led to a significant amount of variation across languages.

As noted by Sapir (1921), variability is an essential feature of language. It ranges from the minute phonological variations to complex sentence structures to the auditory or visual processing of the linguistic signal. Due to the discursive nature of language variations, there exist several different branches of variation studies. Research in this discipline revolves around identifying and explaining the varying forms, functions and structures of linguistic systems. In recent years, several studies have been undertaken that deal with issues related to linguistic identity and its explanation in terms of group behaviour rather than personal idiolectic utterances. Works such as Trudgill (2000a), Trudgill et al. (2000), Crystal (2000), Bauman (2004),

Blommaert (2005, 2010), Brenzinger (2007), Edwards (2009), and Norton (2013) have contributed immensely towards the explanation of this phenomenon from both social and typological perspectives. Identity is grounded in beliefs about the past, heritage and ancestry, and its belonging to a people, a place, and a way of life (Joseph 2016). Among the many ways in which such a belonging is signified, the critical aspect of one's identity is nested in the language a person speaks and how they speak it, whether it ranks among the most powerful or is a weaker variety. The importance of investigating one's identity through language is that through language, people and places are named, heritage and ancestry recorded and passed on, and beliefs developed and ritualised. However, the discussion on identity is not restricted only to demographic details such as place, gender, heritage or ancestry, rather, it includes the sense of belonging, which tends to be naturalized and gets further articulated and politicized only when it encounters some external threat. Such a belonging displays the characteristics of both exclusive and inclusive features because of its boundaries (Davis 2010). Thus, among all kinds of identity-centric questions, linguistic identity plays a vital role in a community setting where we encounter issues related to political powers of languages, contact and convergence leading to language change, issues of migration, language endangerment and revival (Edwards 2009).

However, there is a considerable dearth of work when it comes to the South Asian Languages (henceforth SALs), especially the micro variations. Thus, through this paper, we discuss the cross-section of language (a micro variation) and identity, considering the conversational discourse of the East Midnapur (henceforth Purba Medinipur Bengali/Odia) community. The paper makes use of structural tools to capture the nuances of the linguistic identity of this community. Using variation studies as a tool, we investigate the issues related to the construction of linguistic identity. In addition, we also explore the dynamicity of the linguistic identity of Odia speakers in Bengal. In addition, we endeavour to assess whether the variety under study should be categorized as a part of the Bangla language or Odia.

The structure of the paper is as follows; Section 2 presents the methodology adopted for data collection, the demographic details of the respondents and the kind

of questionnaire used. Section 3 deals with understanding the concepts of variation. Here we not only lay stress on the aspects of variation but also on the distinction between social and linguistic identities. Section 4 presents a detailed description of the historical background of the exhorted Odia diaspora. It then moves on to identifying traces of their linguistic identity through a structural analysis of their regular conversations. Section 5 concludes the paper by giving an overview of our final observation regarding the linguistic identity of the Medinipur speakers.

2. Methodology

The data for the current research have come from several speakers with a heterogeneous sample set. In order to get an in-depth understanding of the linguistic identity of this diasporic community, data have been collected from both sides of the border, i.e. in West Bengal and Odisha- from the villages of Digba, Borai, Jahalda, Kanthi, Telto, and Chandaneshwar, Bichidrapur, respectively. Demographically, the interviews conducted were mainly of a mixed group with both male and female participants and various age groups and social backgrounds. The participants have been categorized into three major age groups: 18-35, 35-55, and older. It has been further categorized according to gender, with twenty male respondents and ten females, respectively. Care has been taken to ensure that data are collected from each of these groups, both from highly educated and less educated backgrounds- such as from PhD students and teachers to tea stall owners, fish vendors, and local tour guides. The interviews carried out are a mixed set, consisting of both natural conversation among the participants and patterned questions. The questionnaire contains both common lexical items as well as complex contractions that are not commonly available in natural conversational data, such as relative clauses. Short discussion sessions were also conducted with the community; they would mainly consist of descriptions of their lives, habits, and descriptions of their livelihood and festivals such as Ratha yatra, Shiv puja, Durga puja, etc. While students were also asked about their schooling, the method of teaching, and examination, homemakers

were asked about their daily routine, social practices, tourism in the area etc. Several of these respondents had been eager and forthcoming in their responses, and very few had tried to misappropriate the data being shared. They eagerly shared some of the traditional songs and dances with us as well. As pointed out in the earlier section by Davis (2010), each of these indicators of culture and customs is carried forward through language.

We make use of Drummond and Schlee's (2016) approach of variationist sociolinguistics (henceforth VS) in order to highlight the relationship between Identity and Language, we give several examples from recorded conversations of native speakers, highlighting the speaker's intent as a significant factor towards language preservation.

VS strongly focuses on the use of inferential statistics and recorded speech and investigates the social factors and linguistic factors. Drummond and Schlee believe that while a considerable degree of variation is linguistically constrained, a great proportion of variation can be attributed to social reasons. Thus, identity may play a crucial role in how language varies and changes. Thus, they focus not only on language variation and the processes by which to determine how it is structured linguistically and socially but also on what variation may mean to the community.

3. Variation and Language

As stated in the previous section, variation is a property of living language and a fundamental notion in linguistics. These differences within language have led to an exciting area of research called variation studies. Labov (1966) opined that the study of language variation is central to the solution of fundamental problems in linguistic theory. He distinguishes linguistic variation in terms of the 'variant' and opines that the relationship of the variable to its variants is similar to the relation between a morpheme and its allomorphs or a phoneme and its allophones. Wolfram (2005) elaborates on this and states that the 'linguistic variable' is an essential component in

variation studies. He defines it as a structural unit that includes a set of variants showing meaningful co-variation. Furthermore, both Labov and Wolfram have stated that the variation is caused due to various socio-cultural and geographical reasons. A detailed discussion of the factors is given below.

3.1 Classification of language variations

As stated above, variations occur due to several factors, including geographical, demographic, political and social factors. Language also changes due to generational and educational differences. Further, differences in language varieties occur due to political patronage of one language over the other or the spacio-temporal location of use, such as in private or public space; or due to community, religion, caste, class, and gender. Finally, it may be a result of language contact, neologisms, code-mixing and code-switching, economy of grammar etc. These differences can be seen to manifest either at the phonological, morphological, or syntactic level.

Apart from the above-mentioned factors, Trudgill (2010) states that the code of a language not only bears within it the meaning of the utterance but also carries the mark of the speaker's identity. He illustrates this with the example of two English men talking about the weather in different dialects; both are mutually intelligible yet speak volumes about the location, culture and identity of the individual men. This can be understood further by observing the varieties of English spoken across the world. English being the lingua franca, has developed several varieties such as Indian English, African English, American English, Australian English etc. However, nestled within each variety of English spoken is the identity of the speaker, and therefore the study of the various varieties of a language is to study the various identities in relation to it.

3.2 Language variation and identity

From the discussion on variations, it has been established that the subtle nuances in language are not only a result of external factors but are community-dependent and, therefore, intrinsically related to their linguistic identity. The questions

of identity are considerably explored from various fields of research- notably anthropology, history, sociology, literature, and cultural studies. While trying to understand the concept of identity, the researchers have attempted to debate the topic from multiple perspectives. They have, in quintessence, attempted to answer the question 'How do we construct what we call our lives?' (Brockmeier & Carbaugh 1984). Each of these varied perspectives has, in a way, contributed to the understanding of the manifestations of identity society.

Research in these fields entails a critical examination of the social, racial, ethnic, religious, gendered, and geographic factors shaping identity. Jenkins (2004) sheds light upon the recent salience of identity studies, noting that the notion of 'Identity' has become one of the unifying themes of social science during the 1990s and has gained impetus ever since. He explains that "Identity, it seems, is bound up with everything from political asylum to credit card theft. And the talk is about change, too: about new identities, the return of old ones, the transformation of existing ones" (Jenkins 2004: 8). Similarly, the notions of language and identity are always inseparably linked. Most often, a linguistic anthropological study of language would entail the study of the community, the culture and customs, which contribute to the formation of the language and identity. Bell (1976) states that the basic assumption of sociolinguistics is that individuals are to be seen as members of a social group, in which they are bound to play social roles, making use of appropriate behaviour, using language as a carrier for the enactment of these roles. Within these social boundaries, the enactment of a speech act is therefore also conditioned by the environment. Thus, we may say that the concept of identity, even in a linguistic context, has several aspects. However, before we proceed further, let us understand the difference between social and linguistic identity.

3.2.1 Social identity and linguistic identity

Although the two concepts seem inseparable, there are subtle differences. A 'linguistic identity' would not only be identified through the language used by a

particular community, living, and occupying a particular space, but also the underlying codes and features that constitute it. From Friedrich (1962), we can understand that social identity is a historically derived system of conscious and subconscious patterns shared and transmitted by the members of a particular society. He goes on to state that language is unique because it is not only a means of communication (as codes) but also a symbolic organization of experience that is interwoven with the cultural subsystem. However, it would be an oversight to only consider the language spoken by an individual as a mark of their identity. Thus, the concept of innateness (Chomsky 1967) is fundamental to the understanding of the linguistic identity of a person. As noted by Jackendoff (1993, 2002), given the correct linguistic environment, a child can acquire native-like fluency in many languages. In the current multilingual environment, the individuals would likely associate themselves with more than one linguistic identity, giving preference to one over the other. Elaborating on this further, let us consider the following scenario – even if a person has a good command of English, it does not make them a native speaker of the language. Rather the language which is acquired through intuitions is the language they are most comfortable with and is the marker of their identity. For many, this language is their mother tongue or First Language (L1). In such a case, the child's identity is constructed from the language used by his community members and maybe geographical location. In such cases of bilingualism or multilingualism, the child may choose the language they are most comfortable in (which may not be the language of his community).

Thus, while an individual can have different or multiple linguistic identities, they can only have one social identity. This notion has been the cornerstone for research in the field of identity issues for the past few years. This current approach to exploring the relationship between variation and linguistic identity is termed as the variationist sociolinguistic approach (VS) by Drummond & Schlee (2016).

3.2.2 Variationist sociolinguistics approach to identity

According to Drummond & Schlee (2016), the VS approach aligns with the Third Wave of Variationist-Sociolinguistic movement (henceforth TWVS), which became

popular in the early 2000s. Research within the third wave of variation regards language usage as not a direct reflection of identity but rather constituting them through stylistic practice (Eckert 2012). This enactment of stylistic elements of language thus puts focus on the social meaning to these variables (Agha 2005, Eckert 2008, Kiesling 2009). Exploring the social meaning of these linguistic features helps linguists to understand the role Language plays in identity construction.

VS strongly focuses on the use of inferential statistics, recorded speech, and investigates the social factors in addition to linguistic factors. Drummond & Schlee (2016) are of the belief that while a significant degree of variation is linguistically constrained, a large proportion of variation may be attributed to social reasons. Here identity may play a crucial role in how language varies and changes. Thus, they focus not only on language variation and the processes by which to determine how it is structured linguistically and socially but also on what variation may mean to speakers and hearers.

Keeping this in mind, we progress towards a better understanding of the language spoken in the Odisha border and the circumstances for the resulting loss of their linguistic identity. In the following section, we discuss the nuances of the linguistic identity of the diasporic community under study through a structural analysis of their regular conversations.

4. Decoding identity through conversational data

The data collected from the community bear testament to the dynamicity of the linguistic identity of these Purba Medinipur speakers. However, before proceeding to an in-depth analysis of the data, let us first understand the historical background of the creation of this exhorted Odia community in West Bengal.

4.1 A historical account of the exhorted Odia diaspora in West Bengal

As noted by Chatterji (1926), since ancient times, the area across Bihar, Jharkhand, Odisha, Bengal and Assam had been neighboring kingdoms (*Anga, Banga, and Kalinga*). Even during the British rule over India, the Bengal presidency consisted of Bengal, Bihar (Bihar and Jharkhand), parts of Chhattisgarh (then Madhya Pradesh), and Odisha. This century-long contact between these areas and the languages spoken there have contributed to the shared linguistic features that are commonly found among the Eastern Indo Aryan languages (henceforth EIA). On April 1, 1912, Bihar and Odisha were separated from Bengal and formed into new states. The division was not only a political move by the then Viceroy Lord Curzon but a linguistic one as well. Odisha's claim to independence was founded foremost on their linguistic identity, which was different from the watershed Bangla identity and is recorded as one of the primary examples of division of state on linguistic grounds. These areas with a majority of Odia speaking people became a part of the neighbouring states of Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal, Bihar and Madhya Pradesh – is now an Exhorted Odia diaspora (popularly known as *bichhinnānchalo*). Though the partition distinguished the states, it did little to divide the linguistic identity of the people residing within the borders. Neither could they completely forsake their Odia identity nor were they able to amalgamate themselves fully into the identity of their adopted land. Just like any partition in history, the people on either side suffered from a lack of identity. Under the governance of the newly formed state of West Bengal, those who mainly spoke Odia were subsumed under the larger Bangla identity.

Several educational policies were passed by the West Bengal government to promote and nurture Bangla as a language. As has been commented by Singh (1993), Scrase (2002), Bandyopadhyay (2005), Sen (2015), and Majumdar (2019), the Left Front government made a move to abolish the teaching of English in the school curriculum and only introduced it in middle school. This was a part of their movement to improve the enrolment rates by encouraging the first-generation learners, who found English more difficult to acquire. The slogan *matri-bhasha matri-dugdha* 'mother tongue; mother's milk' rallied the people in the ideological movement against

English as an alien and colonial imposition. However, it crippled a generation of Second Language (SL) English Learners. Their ideological stance, led by the Ashok Mitra Commission, worked systematically to tighten the curriculum of the government schools to keep it strictly in Bengali. However, the adverse effect of this political movement, in turn, laid heavy imposition on these diasporic Odia speakers. It has been noted by Bandyopadhyay (2005), Sen (2015) and Majumdar (2019) that the language restrictions imposed on these isolated speakers began from the school levels. This has been the scenario since the 1912 partition, made official in 1936. However, despite the harsh regulatory measures by the government, the speakers of the Purba Medinipur area have retained a significant essence of Odia language. On close examination of their language - *guiha-Odia* (bad Odia) - one can easily identify the Odianess in their language. To add further from the recorded conversations, we observe an odd situation of code mixing in the border village of West Bengal- Odisha, such as Digha, Tatlo, Borai, Teghoria, and Chondoneshwar. Some examples of code-mixing have been given below. The data have been taken from the recorded conversations with some border duellers.

(1) Village Head's house

Pratiti asks the question:

001. *edike ki āro pOshu pākhi ṭhāk-to?*
here Q more animal bird live-PST
'Did more birds and animals live here?'

The Headman's wife (002) and daughter-in-law (003-004) answered:

002. *hmm jṅgol ṭhilā*
yes forest be.COP.PST
'Yes, there was a forest.'

003. *mu sun-i-cch-i bābā-r ṭhekie, dekkhi-nāi*
1SG hear-PFV-PRES-1SG father-GEN from saw-NEG
'I've heard from my father but have never seen it.'

004. *edigā jṅgol ṭhilā, horin ṭhilā, r otā ke ki bolā hoi,*
here forest be.COP.PST deer be.COP.PST and that Q wh say happen,

gondhār *ṭhilā*
rhino be.COP.PST
'Here, there was a forest deer, and what do you call it, rhino.'

Pratiti reacting to the statement:

005. *gondār* *cchilo?* *etā* *kon* *jongol-er* *onsho* *cchilo*
rhino be.COP.PST this which forest-GEN part be.COP.PST
je *gondār* *cchilo?*
that rhino be.COP.PST
'Rhino? Which forest was this a part of that there were rhinos here?'

The head replies (006, 008) and Pratiti reaction (007):

006. *etā* *pipiliyā* *mohān-er* *ansho* *ṭhilā.* *Indiā-ro* *māp-e* *occhi*
this pipli mohan-GEN part be.COP.PST India-GEN map-PP be.COP

'This was Pipli Mohan. It is there on India's map.'

007. *pipiliā* *mohān* ?
pipli mohan Q
Pipli Mohan?

008. *hā* *ansho* *cchilo*
yes part be.COP.PST
'Yes it was a part.'

009. *ei* *tempo* *wālā-ke* *bolen* *āmāe* *mācha* *koThi* *diye* *niye jāo*
this tempo person-ACC say.HH 1SG.ACC fish village through take go
'Tell your tempo driver to take to the fishing village.'

okene *pipliā* *mohān*
010. there pipli mohan
'There is Pipli Mohan.'

(line, 139-144)

(2) Conversation with some residents of the border village of Digha

Pratiti introducing herself and her work:

001. *ācchā* *nomoskār* *āmi* *bhāshār* *opor* *kāj* *kor-cch-i*
okay hello 1SG language on work do-IMPF-1SG
'Okay, hello. I'm working on languages.'

002. *eije* *bānglā-urīyā* *mishe* *āpnāder* *bhāshā-Tā-r* *opor*
this Bangla-Odia mixed 2SG.HH language-DEF-ACC on

reseārch kor-cch-i.

research do-IMPF-1SG

‘This mixed language that you have with Bangla and Odia, I’m working on that.’

The respondent answers back:

003. *ei bhāshā-Tā āsi, guihā uriyā botte ār*

this language-DEF be.COP, bad Odia EMPH and

guihā bonglā misā misā kothā ācchi

bad Bangla mix mix speech be.COP

‘This language is bad Odia and bad Bangla mixed together.’

004. *kintu āmāgo desher bhāssā uriyā bhāsā nāi*

but 1SG.POSS native-place-GEN language Odia language not

‘But my native language is not Odia.’

005. *āmāgo desh-er je bhāsā missā ācchi,*

1SG.POSS native place-GEN that language mix be.COP

uriyābānglā missā ācchi

Odia-Bangla mix be.COP

‘My native Language is a mixed language, between Odia and Bangla.

(line, 239-244)

The above conversations highlight the dynamicity of the speakers. The first excerpt is a conversation with the village headman and his family from the West Bengal side of the border. Here we notice that while the spoken language has more Odianess than Bangla, the village Head slips into Bangla (*cchilo*) while giving instructions on how to reach the forest of Pipli Mohan. This may be attributed to the fact that he worked in Digha as a hotel staff and had to deal with standard Bangla speaking customers. Similarly, for the woman in the second example, working as a cleaning lady in the hotels of Digha has given her a good command of Bangla. Thus, when she wants to speak in Odia, she uses the markers such as *occhi* for copula and *-ro* as a locative marker. However, when her speech reverts to Bangla, she spontaneously uses the Bangla markers such as *āche* and *-te* for copula and locative markers.

The livelihood of these people living in the border between Odisha and Bengal greatly depends on the inflow of tourists to Digha (a popular seaside retreat for most Bengalis). They either work in the hotels or at the market and thus are adept at

speaking both languages. This fluidity of the economic border is also reflected in the linguistic identity of the people. However, the reverse is not true for the Odia speaking residents in Bengal. A conversation with a tea seller revealed that, although he is a native of the Odisha living in West Bengal, he does not want his children to learn Odia. Instead, he wants them to learn Bangla so as to avail better opportunities. As seen from the data, although the speakers retain some of the Odia features of their language, they willingly identify and amalgamate themselves into the larger, more dominant Bangla identity. This is further portrayed in the data discussion section.

4.2 Analysis of data

These Odia specific properties are categorized into the various linguistic levels as given in the following tables (2-3):

4.2.1 Phonological variation

English word	Bangla word	Medinipur variety	Odia word
father-in-law	<i>shoshu:r</i>	<i>sosur</i>	<i>sosurɔ</i>
uncle	<i>kākā</i>	<i>kāku</i>	<i>kɔkā</i>
brother-in-law (elder)	<i>bhāsur</i>	<i>bhāisu</i>	<i>derhasurɔ</i>
brother-in-law (younger)	<i>dæɔr</i>	<i>dourO</i>	<i>diorɔ</i>
wife's brother	<i>shālā</i>	<i>saLa</i>	<i>saLā</i>
money	<i>Tākā</i>	<i>Taŋkā</i>	<i>Tankā</i>
rice	<i>bhāth</i>	<i>bhāɔ</i>	<i>bhāɔ</i>
fish	<i>mācch</i>	<i>māchhɔ</i>	<i>māchhɔ</i>
coconut	<i>nārkoI</i>	<i>nārkel/noriyā</i>	<i>naRiā</i>
cucumber	<i>SaSā</i>	<i>sasā/kāākri</i>	<i>kakuDi</i>
salt	<i>nun</i>	<i>nuNɔ</i>	<i>luNɔ</i>
forest	<i>dʒaŋgoI</i>	<i>dʒaŋgal</i>	<i>dʒaŋgalɔ</i>
house	<i>ghar</i>	<i>gharɔ</i>	<i>ghɔrɔ</i>
water	<i>dʒal</i>	<i>dʒala</i>	<i>pāNi</i>
potter	<i>kāmār</i>	<i>kumor mistri</i>	<i>kumbhārɔ</i>
here	<i>ekhāne/eidike</i>	<i>ēkēñē/eTke/eimuɔ/edige</i>	<i>eiThi</i>
there	<i>okhāne/sekhāne/seidike</i>	<i>okēñē/ seiTiki/seTke</i>	<i>seThi</i>
sit	<i>bosh</i>	<i>buus</i>	<i>bɔɔ</i>

Table 2. Phonological variation among the three languages

From Table 2, we observe that the primary phonological difference between standard Bangla and the Medinipur variety is the use of the word-final vowel /ɔ/-, a feature distinctively found in Odia. It is to be noted that in Purba Medinipur Bangla, the [ɔ] occurs primarily after a voiceless alveolar consonant such as [t] and [r] such as in the words *sosurɔ* ‘father-in-law’ and *bhātɔ* ‘rice’. Similarly, the front rounded vowel [o] in standard Bangla is replaced by the back rounded vowel [ɔ], as seen in the words such as *dʒangal* in place of *dʒangol*. This resembles the Odia word more with the predominant use of the [ɔ] vowel instead of the [o] commonly seen in Bangla. One significant difference to be noted is the remnants of the retroflex [N] in the variety, while standard Bangla does not have any retroflex.

4.2.2 Lexical variations

English words	Bangla words	Purba Medinipur words	Odia words
I	<i>āmi</i>	<i>mu</i>	<i>mu</i>
boy	<i>chele</i>	<i>chuā/puɔ</i>	<i>puɔ</i>
girl	<i>meye</i>	<i>jhiɔ-chuā</i>	<i>jhiɔ</i>
elder brother	<i>baro bhāi/dādā</i>	<i>borā bhāi/dāddā</i>	<i>baDɔ bhai</i>
sister	<i>didi/bon</i>	<i>didi/ bon</i>	<i>bhauNi</i>
father	<i>bābā</i>	<i>bābā</i>	<i>bāpā</i>
mother	<i>mā</i>	<i>mā</i>	<i>mā/bau</i>
grandmother	<i>didā/Thākumā</i>	<i>diddā/Thākudidi</i>	<i>āi/jeje mā</i>
grandfather	<i>dadu/Thākurdādā</i>	<i>dāddu/burɔ bābā</i>	<i>ajā/jeje bāpā</i>
sister-in-law	<i>boudi</i>	<i>bou/didi</i>	<i>bhāujɔ</i>
teacher	<i>māster/shikkhok</i>	<i>māstār/sār</i>	<i>shikhyakɔ</i>
village headman	<i>mukhiyā</i>	<i>muabi</i>	<i>mukhiɔ</i>
priest	<i>purohi:t</i>	<i>purut/bhrahman/bāmun Thakur</i>	<i>purohi:ta/pujāri</i>
fisherman	<i>dʒele/dhibor</i>	<i>dʒele/jaliyɔ</i>	<i>keuTɔ</i>
boatsman	<i>mājhi/nāiyā</i>	<i>mājhi/</i>	<i>nāuriā</i>
bindi	<i>Tip</i>	<i>Tikli</i>	<i>Tikili</i>
bangles	<i>churi</i>	<i>kāānthi</i>	<i>chuDi</i>
comb	<i>chiruni</i>	<i>chiran/ panyā</i>	<i>pāniā</i>
sari	<i>shārii</i>	<i>luggā</i>	<i>lugā,sadee</i>
puffed rice	<i>muRii</i>	<i>muRii</i>	<i>muRhi</i>
big boat	<i>boro noukā</i>	<i>bhā:sāri noukā</i>	<i>baRɔ dangā</i>
bed	<i>bichānā/khāT</i>	<i>bichhnā/khaTTɔ</i>	<i>bichhaNā/khaTɔ</i>
buy	<i>kenā</i>	<i>khorid</i>	<i>kiNibā</i>
say	<i>bola</i>	<i>kuɔ</i>	<i>kuhɔ</i>

Table 3. Lexical variation among the three languages

The lexical variations found between the languages highlight the similarities between the Purba Medinipur variety and Odia. A close scrutiny of the lexical items shows an interesting phenomenon where the speakers of Purba Medinipur variety not only display similarity with the Bangla lexical terms but have also retained much of the Odia lexical terms as well. This is especially seen in terms related to household items such as ‘comb’, ‘sari’, ‘bangles’ and ‘bindis’. However, for common nouns such as ‘boat’ and personal relationships such as ‘grandmother’, ‘grandfather’ and ‘sister-in-law’, the speakers use the Bangla counterparts. What is striking is the Bangla word *bou* ‘wife’, retains the meaning in the Purba Medinipur variety, however, in Odia, while the word is being used to mean ‘mother’, the equivalent term is with an aspirated *bɔhu*. Due to the occurrence of such terms in the variety, it may be posited that the majority of the root words are from Odia. However, due to language contact and the hegemony of Bangla over this variety, the speakers have adopted some Bangla lexical terms and intonations. Such similarity between the two languages is more evident at the morpho-syntactic level.

4.2.3 Morpho-syntactic variations

Both the languages, being a part of the Eastern Indo-Aryan branch, share similar features, such as word order (3-4), use of reduplication (5-6), marking definiteness on the noun (7-8), and dropping of the copula (9-10). However, it is important to note that the copula is mandatorily dropped in Bangla, whereas, in Odia, it is optionally dropped.

(3)	<i>āmi</i>	<i>bhāṭh</i>	<i>khā-chchh-i</i>	
	1SG	rice	eat-IMPF-PRES. 1.SG	
	‘I am eating rice.’			(Bangla)
(4)	<i>mu</i>	<i>bhāṭṭ</i>	<i>khā-u-chh-i</i>	
	1SG	rice	eat-IMPF-PRES.1.SG	
	‘I am eating rice.’			(Odia)

- (5) *ākāsh* *theke* *jhiri-jhir* *bristi* *poR-ecchi-l-o*
sky from RED rain fall-PFV-PST-3SG
'Rain started falling from the sky.'
(Bangla)
- (6) *ākasha-ru* *jhiri-jhiri* *barshā* *pad-i-lā*
sky-LOC RED rain fall-PFV-PST.3SG
'Rain started falling from the sky.'
(Odia)
- (7) *bācchcchā-Ti* *bāgān-e* *khel-cch-e*
child-DEF garden-LOC play-IMPF-PRES.3SG
'The child is playing in the garden.'
(Bangla)
- (8) *pilā-Ti* *bagicha-re* *kheLu-chh-i*
child-DEF garden-LOC play-IMPF-PRES.3SG
'The child is playing in the garden.'
(Odia)
- (9) *āmi* *ekjon* *shikkhok*
1SG one teacher
'I am a teacher.'
(Bangla)
- (10) *mu* *jaNe* *shikyaka* *(aTe)*
1SG one teacher be-COP PRES 1SG
'I am a teacher.'
(Odia)

Despite such similarities between Bangla and Odia, we observe subtle morphological and lexical differences. The following examples (11-13) highlight these differences. We observe that the locative marker used in Purba Medinipur Variety (PMV) is more akin to Odia, with slight phonetic variation from *-re* (in Odia) to *-ro*. On the other hand, the Bangla locative marker is a clipped form of *-te* (Dasgupta 2003).

- (11) *āmi* *rāstā-e* *(āchi)*
1SG road-LOC (be-COP)
'I am on the road.'
(Bangla)
- (12) *mu* *rāstā-ro* *(ochi)*
1SG road-LOC (be-COP)
'I am on the road.'
(PMV)

- (13) *mu rāstā-re (ɔchi)*
 1SG road-LOC (be-COP)
 'I am on the road.' (Odia)

Similarly, while both standard Bangla and Odia use the past tense marker [-/] (14 and 16), the Purba Medinipur variety (15) uses the nasalized [-n] instead. Besides this, it is to be noted that the north Odia variety uses the [-n] instead of [-/] for marking past tense in the first-person singular.

- (14) a. *āmi bhāṭh bāni-echhi-l-ām*
 1SG rice make-PFV-PST-1.SG
 'I have made rice.' (Bangla)
- b. *tui bhāṭh bāni-echhi-l-i*
 2SG.NH rice make-PFV-PST-2SG.NH
 'You have made rice.'
- c. *tumi bhāṭh bāni-echhi-l-ɔ*
 2SG.H rice make- PFV- PST-2SG.H
 'You have made rice.'
- d. *āpni bhāṭh bāni-echhi-l-en*
 2SG.HH rice make- PFV- PST-2SG.HH
 'You have made rice.'
- (15) a. *mu bhāṭṭ randh-e-thi-n-i*
 1SG rice make- PFV-AUX.PST-1SG
 'I have made rice.' (PMV)
- b. *tu bhāṭṭ randh-i-thi-l-u*
 2SG.NH rice make- PFV-AUX.PST-2SG.NH
 'You have made rice.'
- c. *tume bhāṭṭ randh-i-thi-l-ɔ*
 2SG.H rice make-PFV-AUX.PST-2SG.H
 'You have made rice.'
- (16) a. *mu bhāṭṭ raindh-i-th-il-i*
 1SG rice make-PFV-AUX-PST-1 SG
 'I have made rice.' (Odia)
- b. *tu bhāṭṭ raindh-i-thi-l-u*
 2SG.NH rice make-PFV-AUX.PST-2SG.NH
 'You have made rice.'
- c. *tume bhāṭṭ raindh-i-th-il-o*

- 2SG.H rice make-PFV-AUX-PST-2SG.H
'You have made rice.'
- d. *āpɔNɔ* *bhāṭɔ* *raindh-i-th-il-e*
2SG.H rice make-PFV-AUX-PST-2SG.HH
'You have made rice.'

Proceeding further to the interrogative constructions (17-19), we note that Purba Medinipur Bangla/Odia prefers to use the Bangla question particle *ki* instead of the Odia *kaN*. However, the variety uses the Odia quantifier *Tike* in place of the Bangla number-quantifier format *ek-Tu*. Furthermore, it may be noted that the Purba Medinipur speakers use *khā-bu* 'will eat' (18), which lacks the [i] marker otherwise present in Odia. This may be surmised to be an outcome of Bangla's influence on the language.

- (17) a. *tui* *ki* *ektu* *bhāṭh* *khā-b-i?*
2SG.NH WH little rice eat-FUT-2SG
'Will you eat some rice?' (Bangla)
- b. *tumi* *ki* *ektu* *bhāṭh* *khā-b-e?*
2SG.H WH little rice eat-FUT-2SG.H
'Will you eat some rice?'
- c. *āpni* *ki* *ektu* *bhāṭh* *khā-b-en?*
2SG.HH WH little rice eat-FUT-2SG.HH
'Will you eat some rice?'
- (18) a. *tu* *ki* *tike* *bhāṭɔ* *khā-b-u?*
2SG.NH WH little rice eat-FUT-2SG.NH
'Will you eat some rice?' (PMV)
- b. *tume* *ki* *tike* *bhāṭɔ* *khā-b-ɔ?*
2SG.H WH little rice eat-FUT-2SG.H
'Will you eat some rice?'
- (19) a. *tɔ* *kaN* *tike* *bhāṭɔ* *khā-ib-u?*
2SG.NH what some rice eat-FUT-2SG.NH
'Will you eat some rice?' (Odia)
- b. *tume* *kaN* *tike* *bhāṭɔ* *khā-ib-o?*
2SG.H what some rice eat-FUT-2SG.H
'Will you eat some rice?'
- c. *āpaNɔ* *kaN* *tike* *bhāṭɔ* *khā-ib-e?*
2SG.HH what some rice eat-FUT-2SG.H

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- ‘What are you doing?’
c. *āpaNɔ ebā kɔN kor-u-cch-anti?*
2SG.HH now WH do-IMPF-AUX-PRES-2SG.HH
‘What are you doing?’

Another instance of similarity between the Bangla variety and Odia can be found in correlative constructions. Both the languages have the *je-she / jie-sie* correlative constructions. However, in Bangla, we notice an instance of split honorificity, which is marked by *jini-uni* (23a). And it is interesting to note that the Purba Medinipur variety, similar to Odia, lacks the use of split honorificity (23b-c):

- (23) a. *āmar kākā jinni Kolkata-e ṭhāk-en*
1SG.POSS uncle who.HH Kolkata-LOC live-PRES.HH
uni khub gyæni:
3SG.HH very wise
My uncle who lives in Kolkata, is very wise. (Bangla)
- b. *mor kāku jie kolkata-ro ruhɔn*
1SG.POSS uncle who Kolkata-LOC lives.NH
she bohut jāne
he a lot knows
‘My uncle who lives in Kolkata, is very wise.’ (PMV)
- c. *mu kākā jie Kolkata-re ruhɔnti*
1SG.POSS uncle who Kolkata-LOC lives.HH
se padhapadhi-re bhalɔ / bohut gyāni
he studies-PP good very wise
‘My uncle who lives in Kolkata, is good at studies/very wise.’ (Odia)
- (24) a. *je māTh-er dhāre bās stænd*
REL field-PP beside bus stand
sekhāne rām dāri-echhi-l-o
there ram stand-IMPF-PST-SG.NH
‘Ram was standing by the field which is beside the bus stand.’ (Bangla)
- b. *je jomi pakh-ro bus stand*
REL field beside bus stand
sei-thini rām Thiā hei-Th-il-ā
there ram stand be.PST-IMPF-PST-3SG
‘Ram was standing by the field, beside the bus stand.’ (PMV)
- c. *jeu jomi pāk-re bus stand*

REL	field	beside-LOC	bus stand
<i>seiThi-ni</i>	<i>rām</i>	<i>Thiā hei-Th-il-ā</i>	
there-DEF	ram	stand be.PST-IMPF -PST-3SG	
'Ram was standing by the field which is beside the bus stand.'			(Odia)

The similarities discussed above indicate the featural resemblance between the variety of language spoken in Purba Medinipur and Odia. These get manifested through lexical, phonetic, and syntactic domains. Such an occurrence further helps us to explore the complexity of their linguistic identity.

5. Conclusion

Keeping in mind the featural similarities that have been discussed previously, we explore the fluidity in the linguistic identity of the Odia speakers in West Bengal. Recollecting the historical account of the exhorted Odia diaspora, we understand that the diasporic population in West Bengal has submitted to the dominance of Bangla. It has been observed that the speakers of Purba Medinipur wish to conform to their adopted Bangla identity and emphasize the need of learning Bangla at an early age for better economic opportunities that the language provides. The speakers attribute the observed similarities between the languages to the close proximity of the two communities and remain completely unaware of the Odia connection in their speech variety. However, from the natural conversational data (as presented above), it is evident that their language has more Odia features than Bangla. Empirical evidence gathered from regular speech reveals this observed similitude between the two languages. We notice that the lexical and morphological roots of the speech variety used by the speakers of the Purba Medinipur area is a variant of Odia with some minor influence of Bangla. The speakers have adopted many Bangla lexical items and phonological nuances in their natural conversations, and as a result, they can easily switch between Bangla and Odia. Therefore, we may surmise that, although the speakers identify themselves with the watershed Bangla identity, the quintessential

Odia features in their language still remain. In conclusion, we posit that the area of Purba Medinipur is a harbour for the Exhorted Odia diaspora people (the *BichinnānchaLa*), and their linguistic identity is more Odia than Bangla.

Abbreviations

ACC	accusative	IMPF	imperfective
AUX	auxiliary	INCL	inclusive
CL	classifier	LOC	locative
COMP	complementizer	MASC	masculine
COP	copula	NEG	negator
DAT	dative	NH	non-honorific
FEM	feminine	PFV	perfective
EMPH	emphatic	PL	plural
FUT	future	PRES	present
GEN	genitive	PRT	particle
H	honorific	PST	past
HH	high honorificity	SG	singular

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