4. Baseline survey and Mobilization

4.0 Preview

Having discussed the important theoretical and conceptual aspects of MTB-MLE in Part I, this chapter sets out to present a localised as well as a practical perspective on these aspects in the context of the Singpho MTB-MLE programme. These chapters are based entirely on the practical experience of the researcher in conceptualising, planning and implementing each and every building block of this programme.

This chapter presents a detailed description of two initial components namely baseline survey and Mobilization that play an important role in the overall effectiveness of the programme. Baseline survey (2.3.1) is one of the most decisive and crucial stages of such a programme which provides all the necessary information and data for a practically achievable plan for an MTB-MLE programme. This chapter describes both the baseline survey and the language attitude survey conducted by the researcher and presents the results of the survey. Discussion on Mobilization component has been incorporated into chapter as both the baseline survey and Mobilization took place simultaneously.

4.1 Initiating the Singpho MTB-MLE

Part I of this work was concerned with the theoretical aspects of MTB-MLE. In Part-II the focus of attention will be shifted to specific details of the Singpho MTB-MLE programme. The planning and implementation of MTB-MLE programmes can deviate from the ideal framework to some extent depending on the socio-economic, political, geographical context of the community. Such deviations can shed new light on the range of different alternative ways to achieve the general goals of an MTB-MLE
programme. In the present chapter and those that follow, an attempt is made to provide a detailed description of the Singpho MTB-MLE programme along with a critical analysis of the practical aspects of the programme. However, it has to be admitted that many components of the Singpho MTB-MLE programme are still in the planning and implementation phase, often requiring the discussion to be prospective, rather than retrospective in nature.

Some of the salient factors that led the community's decision to start an MTB-MLE programme for the children of their community are highlighted below.

The first ever exposure of the Singpho community to MTB-MLE took place through a baseline survey conducted by the researcher in 2006. As part of a Mobilization effort, this survey was followed by a general meeting of the community. This meeting was attended by members of the younger and the older generation alike, as well as by the mothers of the community. This meeting formed the basis of what later developed into an MTB-MLE programme for the community. Those present in the meeting dwelt on the issues relating to the endangerment of their mother tongue and the need for mother tongue education for their children. As the researcher explained the various levels of Joshua Fishman’s Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (GIDS)\textsuperscript{10} (a means of measurement that helps in categorising languages according to their level of endangerment), the members of the community were startled to see their language was just one step away from being endangered. This realisation prompted an active session where numerous comments and suggestions to preserve their language and culture were offered by the members. This session and the results of the baseline survey clearly showed a tendency of gradual decline in the use of the language by the young members of the community. The disruption in intergenerational transfer of cultural and traditional knowledge in the community also became apparent to the community members. At the same time, the meeting reflected the concern of the community to do something to prevent their language from being lost. The meeting also

\textsuperscript{10} The 8-level Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (GIDS) proposed by Fishman (1991) is a tool to assess any language in terms of its language vitality. This scale was used during the first meeting with the community to help them locate the position of their language on the scale. It definitely raised the level of their realisation regarding the need to preserve and revitalize their mother tongue.
discussed the issue of the educational failure among the Singpho children. Some parents reported that the performance of their children in school deteriorated as they went to higher classes. The meeting eventually resolved to start a MTB-MLE programme for the children of the community and selected a group of community members to participate in the first ever Mobilization workshop for the Singpho community towards MTB-MLE.

In November, 2006 the selected group of Singpho members participated in a Mobilization workshop held in Guwahati. After three days of discussion with the resource persons and consultants, the group finally chalked out a detailed plan for the programme. The group also spelled out the reasons behind the community’s decision for conducting MTB-MLE programme in the following terms:

1. Preservation and revitalization of their indigenous language and culture:

   The community would run the MTB-MLE programme since it would help them in preserving and revitalizing their indigenous language and culture. This would be possible through the strategy of incorporating indigenous knowledge, culture and tradition through their mother tongue in the textbooks and in the curriculum.

2. Enhancement of the cognitive development of the Singpho children:

   The low rate of educational success among the Singpho children also contributed towards the decision in favour of an MTB-MLE programme. Since this programme would facilitate a culturally appropriate and learner-centred education though the children’s mother tongue, it would thus be able to develop the cognitive skills to its maximum level. That would help the children to learn the basic literacy skills and also the basic educational concepts more comfortably. Subsequently, this would enable a faster and more comprehensive learning of the second language and other abstract concepts for the learners.

3. Enrichment of literature in the Singpho language:
This programme was also expected to create a large number of writers in the language. This would enable efforts to write down the rich variety of oral literature of the community.

Therefore, keeping these objectives in view, the members of the community chalked out a tentative plan of action in the Mobilization workshop. According to this plan, the Singpho MTB-MLE would be initially designed for two years for teaching the Singpho MT to the children. The final semester would lay emphasis on preparing the students for a smooth transition into the learning of their second language. Initially, this programme would cover children between 3-4 years of age who, by the age of 6, would transition into the mainstream school after having undergone 2 years of MT learning.

4.2 Conducting surveys

As pointed out in 2.4.1, the baseline survey is one of the important components of an MTB-MLE programme. Such a survey helps in understanding the existing status of the community in terms of their population, educational status, economy, and many other factors which can potentially influence the objective and nature of the programme.

The baseline survey for the Singpho community was conducted in the form of two different surveys in Ketetong under Tinsukia district in Upper Assam in 2006.

Section 4.2.1 below presents some general information that was collected during the survey. This set of data mainly relates to the demography, economy, education, health and transportation of the Singpho community in the Ketetong area.

Section 4.2.2, on the other hand, focuses specifically on language usage among the members of the community and the attitude towards their language. This discussion

4.2.1 Baseline survey

The baseline survey was aimed at gathering general information about the community in that place. A carefully planned questionnaire designed by the researcher was used in eliciting responses from the informants. The results of the survey presented a picture of
the existing status of the community in terms of the population, educational status and sources of income.

During this survey, 68 Singpho families in Ketetong were contacted. At least one person from each of the families was interviewed. The researcher was fortunate to receive willing assistance and cooperation from the members of the Singpho community.11

The results of the survey presented a clear picture of the demographic, educational and economic status of the community in Ketetong. A brief account of each of these components is given below.

- Demography

Demographically Singphos in Ketetong are a very sparsely populated community. At the time of the survey, there were only 68 families living in the whole village spreading approximately over a 3 square kilometre area. The total population was estimated at 355. The male and female population was estimated at 179 (50.43%) and 176 (49.57%) respectively. The houses are sparsely located with vast forest areas around them.

- Education

The results of the survey revealed a higher rate of educational failure in the higher level of classes among the members of the community. Statistically, 40.30% of the total population was found to be below the 10th standard in terms of formal schooling, while a mere 4.22% have been successful in completing graduation. At the time of the survey, there was only one person who had obtained a post-graduation degree. As far as the number of available schools in the village is concerned, there is one primary school

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11 I would like to express my sincere thanks and gratitude to Slg. Rajib Ningkhee and his wife Sgjan Panlong Ompop for their invaluable help both in conducting this survey as well as in all my work in the Singpho area over the last five years. I am also grateful to them for accepting me as one of their family members. I have been receiving their gracious hospitality since 2004.
(Assamese Medium), one high school and one private English medium school (offering education only up to Class 4).

- Economy

The survey results show that economically this community has a strong agricultural base. Apart from the production of paddy, this community also produces tea as an inherited business. The Singphos are known as pioneer tea growers in Assam. The statistical data of the survey shows that a total of 79.41% of the total population is dependent on agricultural activities for their livelihood, while 22% are engaged in government service. Only a mere 4.41% earns their livelihood through business.

- Transportation

The village is located about 9 kilometres away from Margherita town. The common mode of transportation for villagers at the time of the survey was bicycle as there was no public transport system available then. The condition of the roads and the bridges were not good. These were not motorable during the rainy season. However, over the last five years there has been a lot of improvement in the transport system. With the improved condition of the road, a regular mode of public transport is available in the form of shared autos to and from the village.

- Health

There is a government dispensary in the village with some competent staff. All the people suffering from any kind of illness initially go to that centre. After preliminary investigation and depending on the seriousness of the illness, the patient is referred to the hospitals in Margherita town for better treatment. As far as hygiene is concerned the community maintains a hygienic atmosphere in their houses. But the filtration of water is not much a common practice in the area even though the drinking water is often found to contain iron.
Figure 4 indicates the statistical representation of all the data obtained in the survey.

Figure 4: Results of Singpho Baseline Survey, 2006

4.2.2 Language usage and attitude survey

The baseline survey discussed above was followed by another survey on the community’s use of their mother tongue and their attitude towards their own language and other languages. This survey also covered the same sample size of 68 Singpho households. However the number of people interviewed was more, and in this case, 130. Of these, 90 were over the age of 45 while 40 were of the age between 18 and 35 years. The first group (the above 45) is labelled as Group ‘A’ and the second group (those between 18 and 35 years) is labelled as Group ‘B’ in the representation of statistical data which is shown below in Table 5.

The purpose of the survey was to

- understand the pattern of use of the MT by these two age groups
• understand the attitude of these two groups of Singpho members towards their own and other languages
• gather information about the functional uses of their MT
• learn about the assessment of the state of their language in terms of language endangerment
• learn about their opinion about a Singpho MT school
• get an understanding of their initial commitment towards an MT school
• find out about their choice of the language of transition for their children

Keeping these objectives in mind, each of the informants was asked the 20 questions in the questionnaire. Care was also taken so that each informant got enough time to think about and discuss the issue raised, before giving his/her response. The questions and the discussion that took place during the interview of the informants also served as a tool for raising the awareness of the community members about the educational challenges usually confronted by their children. It was proved to be an effective Mobilization effort on the part of the community members in this regard.

Table 5: Results of the Language usage and attitude survey, 2006

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language Usage</th>
<th>In Home</th>
<th>Market</th>
<th>School/college</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of Singpho</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of Assamese</td>
<td>00</td>
<td>12.6%</td>
<td>94%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of English</td>
<td>00%</td>
<td>00%</td>
<td>00%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondents' perception on the endangerment of their MT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Endangered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Respondents' assessment of the need of Singpho Mother Tongue school

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>96.7%</td>
<td>77.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3%</td>
<td>22.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Choice of language of transition

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assamese</th>
<th>English</th>
<th>Hindi</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>77.8%</td>
<td>95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>00%</td>
<td>00%</td>
<td>00%</td>
<td>00%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data in Table 5 indicates a number of factors concerning the use of language and the language attitude of the members of the Singpho community in Ketetong. These are discussed below.

a) Language Usage

Under this category, the survey looked at the use of the Singpho language by the members of the community in both the groups. The elicited data revealed that the Singpho language which is their MT is predominantly used in the home domain of the speaker. In case of the use of Singpho in domains other than home it was observed that the older generation availed the opportunity to use their MT in market communication to some extent. However, no such instance of such use was found in the case of the younger members. This indicates the gradual contraction in the scope of use of MT for the native speakers.

At the same time, it was observed that the use of Assamese, the state language, is predominant in market area as well as in schools and colleges. The use of English was found to be completely non-existent except for a mere 5% of the younger generation who used it in the school. These members are the children of comparatively well-off families in the community who have admitted their children in the local English medium school.
b) Language endangerment

For this category the survey sought to investigate the community’s perception towards the current status of their MT in terms of its level of endangerment. During the interviews with different members from both age groups it was found that most of the members are aware of the gradual disappearance of their mother tongue from among the speakers of the community. During the discussion many of the members expressed the opinion that the use of Singpho vocabulary by the speakers was gradually disappearing. Interestingly, 25% of the younger members of the community did not seem to have any idea about the state of endangerment of their language. Most of the members interviewed during the survey strongly expressed the view that something should be done in order to prevent this loss of the Singpho language from within the community. It was also equally encouraging to observe that 75% of the younger members of the community had the same feeling. They expressed their desire to actively support any endeavour to help prevent this loss of their mother tongue.

c) Need for Singpho Mother Tongue school

This survey also tried to take stock of the community’s opinion about a possible school for teaching the mother tongue to the Singpho children. A number of questions were earlier formulated in order to place this proposal in front of the members of the community. The responses showed that most of the members strongly support the idea of starting a school for teaching the Singpho language to their children as well as to other members of the younger generation. In case of Group B, 22.6% was uncertain about the absolute necessity of an MT school. Rather, they thought that it would be more beneficial for them in the longer run to practise and learn English instead of their MT. At this point, the researcher took the opportunity to explain to them the necessity and significance of Mother Tongue teaching. More particularly, the need for the MT as a medium of instruction at the initial stage to develop the cognitive faculty of the children was highlighted.
It was also pointed out that this in turn would help them to pick up other languages and more abstract concepts in the higher classes. 3% of the older members of the community expressed the view that there was no need of MT teaching as their children could speak their mother tongue fluently. Rather, they suggested that these children should have more exposure to the teaching of English as they felt that this would be instrumental in getting jobs in the future.

d) Choice of the language of transition

The survey also tried to find out the community’s choice of the language they would prefer their children to learn after completing their MT school. This question to elicit responses in this regard was set with the assumption that the community would eventually express a desire to start an MT school for their children. It is significant to note that the data showed that most of the members preferred English as the transition language for their children. This was not so surprising in view of the growing tendency among the parents to send their children to English medium schools for reasons of expediency. Some of the members from the older group did speak in favour of Assamese as the transition language, but the majority indicated an inclination towards English.

Apart from the aspects relating to language usage and attitude in the community discussed above, the survey also looked at the functional use of the Singpho language among the members of the community. The statistics showed that only a mere 33% among the older people can actually read the Singpho language, while 5% of the younger members claimed they can somehow read it but are not confident about a satisfactory level of comprehension of the written text. The situation in terms writing was more serious, with only 11% of the older generation claiming that they could write the language. None among the younger members of the community were confident about writing the language correctly. It should be clarified that reading and writing the Singpho language is to be understood in the
context of the standard form of the language known as Kachin Jinghpaw. This is the variety that is used in the literature in Myanmar and Burma. The issues involving Kachin Jinghpaw and Singpho are elaborately discussed in Sections 5.5.1-2 of the next chapter.

Apart from collecting data on these various issues dealt with above, the survey was also used as a tool for generating awareness among the community regarding the benefits of MT education. It helped the researcher to talk and discuss important issues relating to linguistic and cultural loss. It was also helpful in highlighting the issue of educational failure to each of the members who came forward to help with the survey. At a subsequent stage, this step seemed to play an important role in enabling the community leaders and parents to take a firm decision regarding starting a Mother Tongue based Multilingual Education Programme for the Singpho children in Ketetong.

4.3 Overview

The present chapter was concerned with a discussion of the information accumulated through the baseline survey conducted by the researcher. Through two statistical presentations, it provided the rationale for starting an MTB-MLE programme for the Singpho community. Both the baseline survey and the language attitude survey served to highlight the current status of the community in terms of both the aspects. The chapter also presented an account of different events such as public meetings as a part of the initial Mobilization programme for the community members. The findings of the two surveys have been instrumental in planning the next steps for the proposed programme.