



*Making of two languages in one  
multilingual landscape: The case of  
Rajbanshi and Tea-garden Sadri*

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# *Plan for the talk:*

- Introducing Rajbanshi and Tea garden Sadri
- Standardization initiatives of Rajbanshi
- Hybridity questions and theoretical tools
- Introducing the field area
- Agreement in Rajbanshi and Sadri
- How the two languages are different in the landscape of several hybrids
- How and why the two languages are different: some arguments

# *Introducing Tea-Garden Sadri*

Sadri is a lingua franca used primarily in East-central India

Migration to North Bengal tea-garden area and settlements gave birth to Tea-garden Sadri

Used by several indigenous language users to exhibit a shared identity

Younger generations shifted to Tea-garden Sadri and use it as their mother-tongue

Indo-Aryan skeleton and lexical items (and features too) of different indigenous languages

# *Introducing Rajbanshi*

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Attested as a variety of Bangla earlier : *Kamrupi Upabhasha* (Chatterji, 1926)

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Established the identity of a language in Linguistic Survey of India (1909), Sanyal (1965)

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Not spoken in old Tea-garden areas

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Southern part of the tea-garden belt, spread towards the lower Assam region, Meghalaya, northern part of Bangladesh, parts of Nepal, eastern Bihar.

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Indo-Aryan skeleton, agreement patterns vary

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Different varieties attested in Jalpaiguri, Alipurduar and Coach Behar area districts of Bengal (area of my field)

# *Rajbanshi and Tea- garden Sadri*

Rajbanshi and Sadri are located at specific zones

They rarely overlap

Speakers can be identified according to the linguistic hierarchy

Rajbanshi pre-dates Tea-garden Sadri

Social mobility in late 19th and early 20<sup>th</sup> movement highlighted the Rajbanshi identity (Basu, 2003)

'Adivasi' identity is an umbrella for different indigenous language users, solidarity is often a digital solidarity in more recent days

## ➤ *Field Area*

*3 districts of West Bengal*

*Border of 3 countries  
3 Indian states*

*(Source: Google Map)*



# *Standardization: The changing stands*

- Following Standard Language Ideology (SLI), There is a bias towards a homogenized language, imposed and maintained by dominant institutions, acts as a model of written language, and usually is the spoken language of upper-middle class (Lippi-Green, 1997)
- Milroy and Milroy (2012) language standardization and social access is related.
- From 2010, focus on restandardization or models of standardization to minority and minoritized languages. Challenges against Haugen's model of Standardization (1966) as there are double-edged standardization.
- In postmodern world, with the social changes role of standard is weakening and the boundaries between standards and non-standards are becoming blur.
- Le Page and Tabouret-Keller (1985): unconscious and more conscious standardization are different

# *Standardization of Rajbanshi*

Standardization efforts in Rajbanshi are more recent (Language Academy in 2016; several ventures of writing grammar and making dictionaries) and conscious efforts.

Lane (2017): minoritized languages standardization efforts are different from national language standardizations. Recent efforts of standardization are documented, accessible and visible

There are negotiation, debate, contestation and appropriation.

A major change in case of agents of standardizations. Local actors as bottom-up policymakers who can support, alter, resist and reject the processes of standardization. Evident in case of Rajbanshi.



# *What about Tea-garden Sadri?*

- Ammon (2017): 'Standard by mere usage', a key concept of communities of practice (discourse communities if the people have never met)
- Eckert and McConell-Ginet, 1992: and 'People who come together and mutual engagement is an endeavour'
- The heart of Sadri is located in Jharkhand, speakers of Tea-garden Sadri are connected to them through primarily digital solidarity.

# *The arguments:*

Sadri and Rajbanshi have been marked as two different languages in the same multilingual landscape in the Himalayan foothills of North Bengal

Different morphosyntactic features of both the languages (e.g. agreement) are found in a mosaic-like pattern in the area

Certain agencies act as the gatekeepers for naming these two languages. where the varieties gradually merge with the so-called standards

# *The two target languages:*

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I claim that the two hybrids belong to two tiers of the social hierarchy that are located at different layers of the same accretion zone which are peripheral (Nichols, 1992).

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Following Aikhenvald (2003), spatio-linguistic gradients may exist in a creole or hybrid language territory.

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LaMa (Krammer et.al, 2022) posits that languages do not emerge, they are 'made'.

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These are socio-historically and ideologically constructed imagined entities.

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Multiple hybrids are spoken in a linguistic landscape, particular ones are chosen and projected as languages.

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# *Language Making*

Language Making (Kramer et.al, 2022) to explain the difference between two link languages in relation to their acceptability

I argue that Sadri and Rajbanshi were conceptualized as two different languages based on certain norms, naming strategy and language policy controlled by the concerned agencies. This is often overlooked where the Language Making (LaMa) strategies are operative

# *The Hybridity Questions and Some Theoretical Tools*

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Both Rajbanshi and Sadri are hybrid languages have been created due to long term language contact and alteration of features.

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The hybrids are identifiable through distinct morphosyntactic features, e.g. agreement features and can be considered as Fused Lects (Auer and Hakimov, 2021)

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Dialect Levelling reduces the variation across varieties. It is operative where 'reduction or attrition of the marked variants are found' . They have been created through 'Koinisation' (as opposed to Pidginization) and Levelling (Kerswill, 2003)

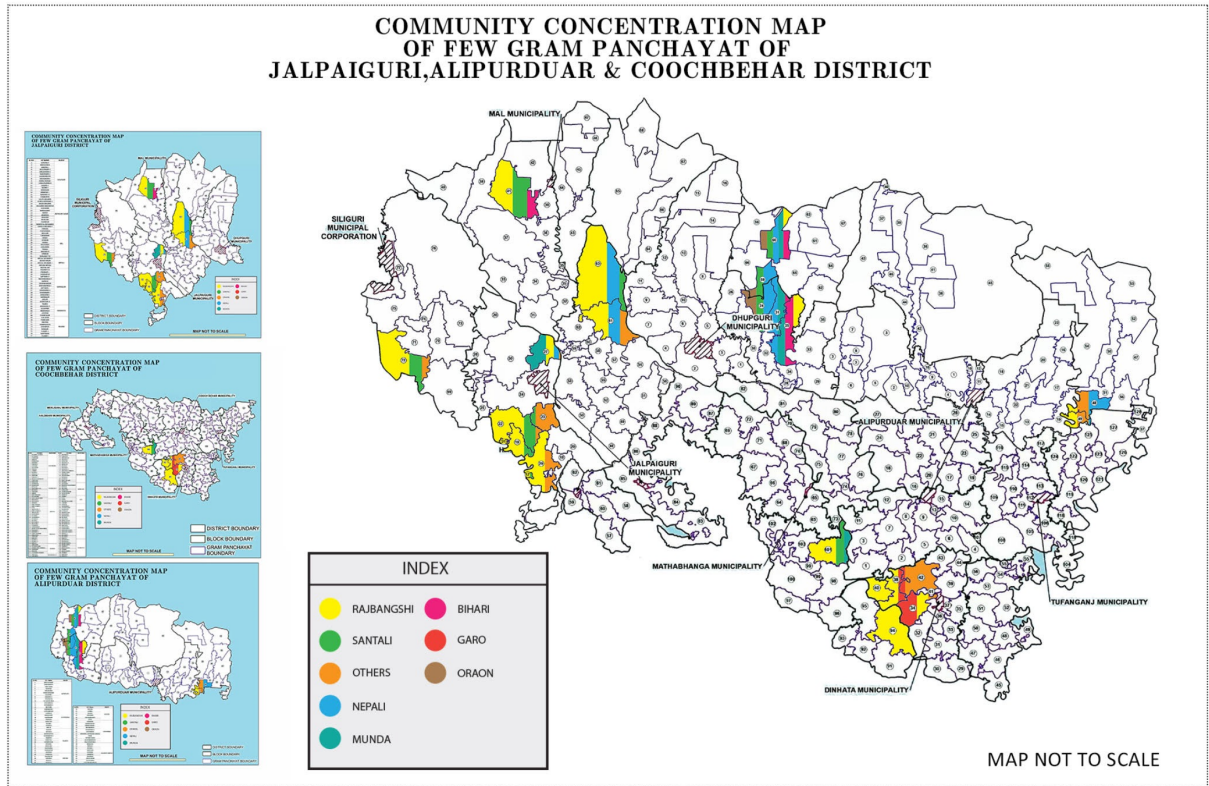
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Community dynamics, language ideology and attitude of the speakers and non-speakers of the hybrid link languages can help us to scan the hybridity of the link languages.

# *Where do we find the speakers?*

- Rajbanshi and Sadri are spoken distinct regions of the same geographical area.
- Due to long term language contact they create fused lects in a mosaic-like pattern.
- There are isolated areas, old tea garden settlements (Line), villages with agricultural land and new tea gardens.
- Tea-garden Sadri is limited to the garden settlements, while Rajbanshi is spoken elsewhere (A general statement!)
- Language policy and planning initiatives and the agencies responsible for naming the hybrid languages restricted the hybrids in two layers.

# Our field areas: (2020-2024)



# *Field area: village names*

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Data was collected from the following villages of the three districts of North Bengal:

No.	DISTRICT	VILLAGE	MAJOR LINGUA FRANCA
1.	Jalpaiguri	Berubari	Rajbanshi
2.	Jalpaiguri	Kharija Berubari	Rajbanshi
3.	Jalpaiguri	Brahmanpara	Rajbanshi
4.	Cooch Behar	Kuchlibari, Dhaprahat	Rajbanshi/borderline?
5.	Jalpaiguri	West Damdim	Sadri
6.	Jalpaiguri	Sannyasikata Giranganj	Rajbanshi
7.	Jalpaiguri	Rangdhamali	Sadri
8.	Cooch Behar	Ghughumari	Rajbanshi
9.	Cooch Behar	Bhawer Thana	Rajbanshi
10.	Cooch Behar	Gosanimari	Rajbanshi
11.	Alipurduar	Birpara	Sadri
12.	Alipurduar	Pradhannagar	Sadri
13.	Cooch Behar	Kamakhyaguri	Rajbanshi
14.	Jalpaiguri	Targhera	Rajbanshi/borderline
15.	Alipurduar	Rangamati	Sadri



# *Agreement in Rajbanshi*

1.a. mui pot̪id̪in bʰat̪ **kʰa:ŋ**

1.sg everyday rice eat-1.sg.PRES.

'I eat rice everyday'

b. mui ɛla bʰat̪ **kʰawa:r d̪ʰoçilɔŋ**

1.sg. now rice eat-1.sg.PRES

'I am eating rice now.'

c. hamra ʃogay pot̪id̪in bʰat̪ **kʰa:ŋ/kʰai**

1.pl all everyday rice eat-1.pl.PRES

'We all eat rice everyday.'

# *Sadri Agreement:*

2.a hamin səbej<sup>h</sup>an b<sup>h</sup>at<sub>ɬ</sub> **k<sup>h</sup>aiŋ**

1.pl all rice eat-PRES-1.pl

'We all eat rice'

b. kail hamin d<sub>ui</sub> baj<sup>e</sup> b<sup>h</sup>at<sub>ɬ</sub> **k<sup>h</sup>a:t<sub>ɬ</sub>rahin**

yesterday 1.pl 2 O'clock-LOC rice eat-PST-PROG-1.pl

'Yesterday at 2 O'clock, we were eating rice'

c. həmin roj<sup>ɔ</sup> d<sub>in</sub> b<sup>h</sup>at<sub>ɬ</sub> **k<sup>h</sup>aila**

1.pl every day rice eat-PRES-1.pl

'We eat rice everyday'

d. hamin kail b<sup>h</sup>at̚ **k<sup>h</sup>ay rəhi**

1.pl yesterday rice eat-PST-PROG1.pl

'We were eating rice yesterday'

# *Where is the demarcation?*

3. a. hamin sɔbej<sup>h</sup>an b<sup>h</sup>at<sub>ɹ</sub> **k<sup>h</sup>aiŋ**  
garden)

1.pl. all rice eat-PRES-1.pl

'We eat rice everyday'

(Sadri, Rangdhamali Tea

b. hama po<sub>ɹ</sub>id<sub>ɹ</sub>in b<sup>h</sup>at<sub>ɹ</sub> **k<sup>h</sup>a:ŋ**

1.pl. everyday rice eat-PRES-1.pl

'We all eat rice everyday'.

(Rajbanshi, Bhawer Thana)

4. a. kal d̪u baʃe m̪oi kʰana **kʰalo** (Sadri, West Damdim)  
yesterday 2 O'clock-LOC 1.sg food eat-PST-PROG-1.sg  
Yesterday at 2 O'clock, I was eating rice'

b. horʃiʈa ar moiri kali bʰaʈ̪ **kʰali/kʰalek** (Rajbanshi, Brahmanpara)  
Harshita and Mauri yesterday rice eat-PST-3.pl  
'Harshita and Mauri ate rice yesterday'

# *Recent data:*

- Piloting (ongoing) in remote parts of Jalpaiguri (Ramshai village) where the Rajbanshi area end and Sadri area begin.
- Out of 25 people interviewed, 14 Sadri speakers claimed that they have some mastery over Rajbanshi, 11 Rajbanshi speakers who can speak Sadri.
- What kind of mastery?
- What are the differences?
- Why are they different?

## *The top-down views:*

- Who were the agents of LaMa previously?
- The educated elites or Bengali *Bhadraloks* who were the gatekeepers of several languages:  
Driven by SLI
- Community solidarity can play a role in Language Making in more recent efforts
- Language attitude plays a role (Irvine and Gal,2000).
- LaMa for Rajbanshi and Sadri have different strategies for LaMa as the solidarity for the speakers were operative in different times and different regions.



# *How are they different?*

- The social mobility movement created a solidarity among a group of people, with the leadership of Panchanan Barma, the Rajbanshi umbrellalla was born. Speakers who came under the umbrella are Rajbanshi speakers.
- The Rajbanshi standardization is an ongoing process, so we can still find the varieties spoken by Rajbanshi people in remote parts which are different fused lects. Still not engulfed by the new standard.

- Tea garden Sadri is gradually creating digital solidarity. It has chances of being engulfed by a different kind of standard.
- The LaMa are different in nature for the two target languages.
- Conflicts in multilingual landscape, multiple hybrids coexist and then replaced by the chosen and codified standards.
- This standard-driven choice is not found in remote areas, as we found.

*What are the important factors for detecting the negotiated forms?*

Dynamics between different communities

Attitude of one community over the others  
(same for children)

Accommodation factors

Network and the position of the hybrid forms  
in the network

Lingua Franca created by the groups, followed  
by the children. Often acquired by them.

# *Why mosaic?*

- I am adopting the term 'mosaic' to talk about the Rajbanshi-Sadri area. Different hybrids based on a number of sociolinguistic factors.
- Hybrid languages are Vehicle languages: part of the Bodo-Garo Vehicle (DeLancey, 2010)
- Van Driem (1993) Claimed that Bodo-Garo was the first to drift away from Tibeto-Burman features.
- It can be argued that the mosaic of hybrids depends on the landscape, social access and hierarchy.

# *Linguistic Landscaping and Sadri*

- Change of the landscape: baganias moving outside garden and adopting Rajbanshi/Nepali/Bangla.
- Distance from economic hubs predict the use of mixed languages
- Children from Rajbanshi community don't know Sadri, but Sadri speakers are switching to Rajbanshi: presence of hierarchies
- Tea gardens are shut down, economy is more tourism-centric: change in the choice of language
- Researcher/NGO tourism and language choice: Will anyone use Sadri at all?
- Mobility patterns are changing: Darjeeling convents as a model of local private school. Use of local languages are prohibited (Field visit at Birpara tea garden area, May 2022).



## *The ‘Bagania’ identity*

- Language maintenance is not observed among the new generation. Due to environmental hazard, people are not willing to live in the tea-garden quarters acquired by the older generations. The old baganias have new houses outside began area, and new language for asserting their new identity.
- Sadri speakers are adopting Rajbanshi gradually.

# *Findings:*

- Community dynamics and geographical location both are important for Rajbanshi and Tea-garden Sadri.
- Sadri in northern part of the North-Bengal Dooers, Rajbanshi in southern part.
- Rajbanshi and Sadri have distinct positions in the social structure, leading them to maintain their own hybrids in their circle. There are hierarchies. Different kind of solidarities.
- Can be identified through different agreement markers, but they overlap too.
- LaMa can account for the different fused lects in the North Bengal Dooers, creation of the two target languages can be accounted for.

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# *Our Team:*

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# *The Field work Team*

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*Thank You!*

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