

The Diglossia Situation in the Garo Folk Music

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ABSTRACT

Language among the Garos has been categorized into 12 major dialects. However, few dialects have placed their significance before music and literature. This paper highlights the importance of a selective dialect through the choice of language resonating with the listeners when an ambiance is filled with multiple dialects speaking community. The importance of what the speakers say and do not say could be decided based on the situation of diglossia. The situation of diglossia reflects the co-existence of formal and informal languages and the requirements of selection between two to three languages or dialects employed in different situations that demand clarity of information shared by a musician or a folklorist. The communicative speech competence decides if the atmosphere in the room has gained momentum, and the listeners' attention with silence defines the command of folk music artists in each situation while sharing information, literature, songs, or recitations. In simple words, the study aims to introduce the choice of language used between the old Garo dialect, modern dialect, and general dialect in folk music that has been competent for usage in each situation with various ethnic groups and communities.

Keywords: Diglossia, Dialects, Speech Competence, Choice of Language, language, folk music

INTRODUCTION

The term 'diglossia' was modeled from the French term *diglossie* and introduced in the article 'Diglossia' by Charles A. Ferguson in 1959. According to him, the term superimposed language, dialect, and variety in the community where two or more languages exist. A similar situation, in general, is called 'bilingualism' or 'multilingualism' by sociolinguists. Ferguson (1959) explained that diglossia may develop from various origins and eventuate in different language situations. To define variety in languages, for convenience of reference the superposed variety in diglossia has been called the H ('high') variety or simply H, and the regional dialects as L ('low') varieties or, collectively, simply L. The theory on diglossia originated from his observations of four languages known in the literature that is Arabic, Modern Greek, Swiss German, and Haitian Creole. The important feature of the H variety and L variety in diglossia is the specialization of functional situations. The usage of diglossia and its varieties has been adopted following Al-Toma's procedure basing it on a transliteration and phonemic transcription of Arabic and Cairo Arabic language. The features are grounded on the function of language, prestige, literary heritage, acquisition, standardization, stability, grammar, lexicon, and phonology.

Charles Ferguson (1959), outlined the features of diglossia as:

"a relatively stable language situation in which, in addition to the primary dialects of the language (which may include a standard or regional standards), there is a very divergent, highly codified (often grammatically more complex) superposed variety, the vehicle of a large and respected body of written

literature, either of an earlier period or in another speech community, which is learned largely by formal education and is used for most written and formal spoken purposes but is not used by any sector of the community for ordinary conversation”.

Faido Simanjuntak et. al. (2019), Based on Ferguson's concept of ‘Diglossia’, Fishman and Fasold developed diglossia into a broad diglossia. In the concept, differences are found between two languages or two dialects. Because the community inside is also multilingual, Fasold calls it double diglossia. According to Lotfi Sayahi (2014), diglossia describes a situation where two linguistic systems coexist in a functional distribution within the same speech community. One system is assigned the status of high variety (H), while the other receives the status of low variety (L). Alan Hudson (2002), Modernization and its various components, culminating in mass education and literacy, have been repeatedly associated with the decline of diglossia.

Scope and Conceptualisation

The Garos are a multi-lingual society with respective dialects and languages within each of the 12 sub-tribes of Meghalaya, India, and Bangladesh. However, a study on language and communication processes within the Garo community has not been categorized based on linguistic varieties, folk music, and geographical distinctions. Therefore, this paper aims to explore the co-existence and command over the language between H-variety and L-variety within the same community during the socialization process in Folk music culture. These varieties have been classified based on their purpose for utilization in literature, domestic, and other institutionalized methods for communication. The study has taken a reference of two major varieties of Garo languages that is *Am·beng* and *A·we* dialects and few other dialects of Garo Hills of Meghalaya to formulate an understanding of the language usage in Garo folk music. The study has been grounded on the concept of Ferguson outlining features of ‘Diglossia’.

As in peer communication, speech competence and language of choice among the Garos act as one of the core principles of sharing information using folk music. Therefore, forms of dialects and languages the community uses in their daily activity have been studied under the lens of diglossia. The situation of Diglossia encompasses different forms of dialects, language, codified language, overtones, and other configurations of language used in the communication process of Garo folk music performance. Foremost, the research paper aims to introduce the concept of diglossia and the practice of bilingualism in the folk music of the traditional Garo society making it the first ever research paper to be written in the above context of the Garo society.

METHODOLOGY

To complete the objective of this paper I formulated phenomenological ethnomusicology through first-hand qualitative data collection and fieldwork. My primary research objectives are a) to introduce the meaning and concept of diglossia practiced in Garo folk music and b) to find out the function of diglossia and the situation applied in Garo society. Secondary sources include research articles and reviews of literature. Primarily, comparative analysis and experiment of *A·we* dialect and *Am·beng* dialect has been conducted through performance and listenership for preferred language situation. My area of study involved all the districts of Garo Hills, Meghalaya to understand their dialects which were demographically segregated. The study also introduced the dialect of Bangladesh that is *dual* used in forms of songs like *rere* and *serinjing*. My methods and techniques include interviews, audio-visual documentation, case studies, participative observations, PRA, and phenomenological experience and live

performance. I believe this research paper has been able to highlight the basic concepts and symbolical aspects of diglossia in the Garo folk music of the Garo Hills of Meghalaya.

DATA ANALYSIS

Concept of Diglossia in Garo Society

Diglossia in Garo society would be a co-existence of formal and informal language varieties spoken by the same community for different purposes. Language distribution in a general Garo society can be coded as High (H)-variety i.e. *A-we* dialect popularly used in literature and general conversations. The very same dialect is used in lyrical composition and music produced for a general understanding of all subtribes of the Garos. While vernacular language variety of all the subtribes used for domestic conversation can be categorized as the Low (L)-variety. The difference between H-variety and L-variety is the utilization of language based on the requirements in each situation, wherein H-variety could be considered as the major language, while L-variety is a minor language or a dialect. Sociolinguists may also denote bilingualism to refer to the term diglossia. These varieties can depend on the quantification of dialect speakers in each situation. Therefore, if *A-we* language that was once considered an H-variety consists of a minority number in an *Atong* sub-tribe territory, a language, for instance, *Atong* language with an L-variety would be considered an H-variety and *A-we* as an L-variety in a reversed circumstance.

Table 1: Use of H and L Variety in Different Situations

Sl. No.	Situations	Language Usage
1	Textbooks & Literature	H
2	Church sermons	H
3	Household dialects	L
4	General communication	H
5	Media	H
6	Folk songs & oral literature	L
7	Knowledge transmission (Households)	L
8	Official notice & Letters	H
9	Meetings and Political gatherings	H
10	Vernacular communication	L

In Table 1, we can see how languages have been distributed based on the relevance of language or dialect in a given society. Garo Hills has converted itself predominantly to *A-we* speaking community despite each region having their respective household dialect. Today use of H-Variety language (*A-we* Dialect) can be seen in almost all the official situations. For instance, textbooks and literature, Church sermons and hymns, educational institutions, formal communication, media or news, official notice, meetings and other gatherings can be seen as the H-Variety language in Table 1. While the L-Variety (*Am-beng* Dialect) can rarely be seen in the official or formal situation, in spite of *Am-beng* Dialect being the household language in most parts of Garo Hills. The relevance and scope of the *Am-beng* Dialect can

be only seen in Knowledge transmission within household during vernacular dialogues or communication.

A. Diglossia in Garo Folk Music

Every society worldwide has a set of languages that coexist within a community. Such a situation exists in Garo society, where two varieties of Garo language co-exist within the same speech community. The same varieties of languages are being utilized in the folk music and recitations of the Garos. Each variety has its fixated function where the H-variety is considered a prestigious variety, often used in modern Garo songs, hymns, and public speaking. As compared to *A-we* Dialect (H-Variety), other dialects like *Am-beng*, *Atong*, *Dual* and many other Garo Dialects are considered L-Variety due to the low usage of language. Examples of Low Variety Dialects *Am-beng*, *Atong* and *Dual* are shown in Table 2, songs when sung in their household dialects it can be considered as High Variety language due to the majority of dialects speaking audience or community within the region. It also highlights the relevance of L-Variety dialects where singers can only use their dialects to sing their respective folk songs and not by any other varieties. Their advantage is the origin of form of song which exists only in their dialect and community. *Am-beng* cannot sing in *Atong* and *Dual* cannot sing in *Ruga* language. It is for this reason communicative speech competence and relevance of situation is required in the Digglosian community.

Table 2: Examples of a Low Variety of Languages Used in Folk Songs of the Garos

Sl.no	Dialects	Form of Songs	Folk songs
1	<i>Am-beng</i>	<i>Serinjing</i>	“ <i>Mengmeng kari mengkari</i> <i>Sko ma bak tiptipa</i> <i>Jika dea dongoba</i> <i>bi sa di sa man dika</i> ”. <i>Aiao!</i>
2	<i>Atong</i>	<i>Gonda</i>	“ <i>Gonda mari gonda dok</i> <i>chaksi chaksil kanai tok</i> <i>siju a song silwanan</i> <i>tausi tautokaina ska</i> ”. <i>Aiao!</i>
3	<i>Dual</i>	<i>Rere</i>	<i>Oh.... chengo a chik mandide</i> <i>Tibot a songniha ne,</i> <i>Tibot a songniha ne.</i> <i>Mia misi namjana,</i> <i>ha song wate katana.</i> <i>Ha rere ha rere!</i>

Table 3: Examples of High Variety of Language Folk Songs Among the Garos

Sl.no	Christian Hymns-English	Translated Garo/A we Hymns
1.	I have decided to follow Jesus	<i>Jisuni ja man ja rikgen anga</i>
2.	Abide with me	<i>Angming dongbo</i>
3.	Amazing grace	<i>Maironga isolni ka sa</i>

4.	How great thou art	<i>Mairongpile dal'a na'a</i>
5.	Showers of blessing	<i>Pattian mikka wadapgen</i>
6.	Our Father who art in Heaven	<i>Oh Salgio donggipa chingni Apa</i>

The H-variety i.e. *A we* dialect is an influencing factor due to the literature and academic Garo textbooks recognized by the board of education (MBOSE) of Meghalaya. Apart from these influences, factors that made *A we* dialect popular were the early education system and the conversion of Garos into Christianity from *A we* regions. The early converted *A we* Christians translated the Bible into a *we* dialect which eventually popularised the dialect in multitude with more Indigenous Garos converting to Christians habituating the dialect into their choice of language. Similarly, as shown in Table 3, most of the translated versions of hymns from English to Garo language were written in a *we* dialect whereas other subtribes of the Garos chose to follow the High variety of language for different purposes in each situation due to the popular culture. While L-variety is considered as vernacular or low variety especially used for domestic purposes between families or the clan folk songs sung within the sub-tribes were able to be understood only by the same dialect-speaking communities.

B. Functions of Double Overlapping Diglossia

Double overlapping diglossia situation of multiple functionalisms of dialects or languages in Garo society is common and mostly used within the family for inter-family communication and daily life in a multilingual community. For instance, most Garo individuals know English, Hindi, *A we*, *Am beng*, and other regional languages spoken in the Garo Hills region. The community uses Hindi for commercial purposes during negotiations. Most modern songs, folk songs, Christian hymns, and common folk songs are sung in a *we* dialect for mutual understanding between the 12 interrelated sub-tribes of the Garos. The *A we* dialect is a High variety of language spoken as a mother tongue within the family however, in contrast, other sub-tribes in Garo Hills have also adopted the language over their dialect for various purposes. Among them, one would be language versatility is an advantage in music performance for larger audience. Conventionally *Am beng* dialect is a High variety within the cluster of *Am beng* dialect-speaking communities used for ritualistic rites and traditional forms of songs in the region of West Garo Hills but at the same time, it is also considered a Low variety of language as compared to a *we* dialect. Language such as English if not known how to speak, individuals in each situation can read the variables transcribed into a Garo language due to the imposition of English Alphabets in literature, music, and for formal education in schools, institutions, and official notifications. Due to the academic system imposed on learning English in schools in books and foremostly the Holy Bible, influences of English language and literature in Garo society have transformed the society to learn English language and the characters for formal application in their daily life.

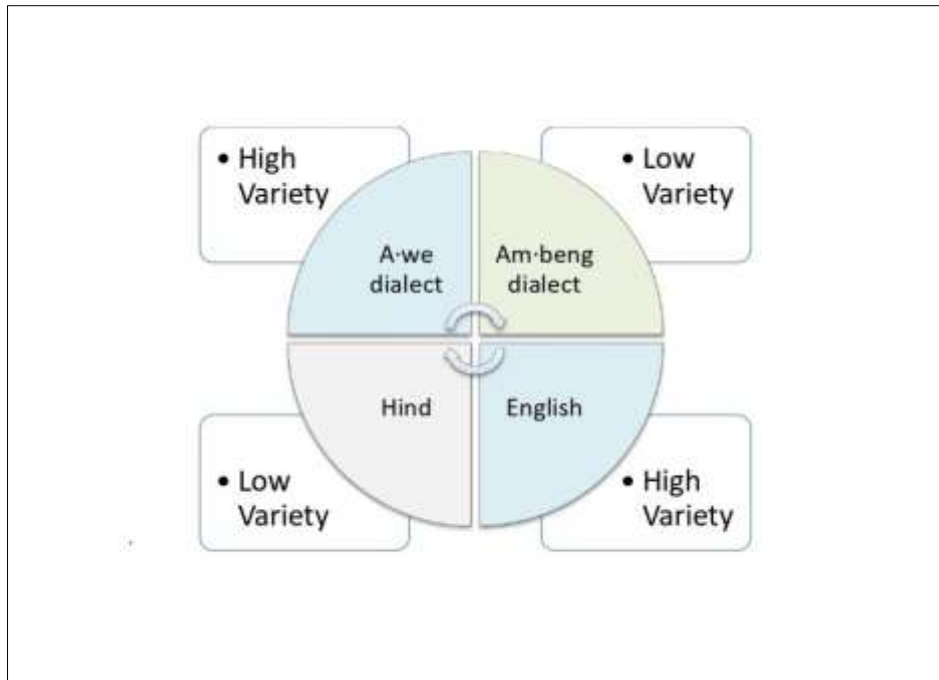


Figure 1: Matrix Cycle of Double Overlapping Diglossia Used in Music Performance

Overviewing multiple functionalities of languages used by a single community in Figure 1, we can understand that the Garo community practices a multilingual society with varieties associated to daily activities. For example: English and Hindi are considered H-variety due to the utility of languages in formal communication, while *A-we* and *Am-beng* dialects are considered L-varieties of language. However, when L-varieties i.e. *A-we* and *Am-beng* dialects are compared to each other *a-we* can be referred to as an H-variety due to the multiple degrees and functions of language within the Garo society. In contrast, *Am-beng* is considered the same unless it has varieties within the variety. Furthermore in Figure 1 we can see that the cycle of languages and dialects can be shared depending on the situation. For instance, a folk fusion band ‘Notes of A-rongga’ from Meghalaya would commonly use their songs as a platform to popularize *A-we* and *Am-beng* dialects. Nevertheless, these languages can differ depending on the audiences present with majority speakers and non Garo dialects speaking audiences. As seen in Figure 1, Singer, speaker or vocalist language choice can follow the cycle of Double Overlapping Diglossia. The language is relevant and influential only when the listeners are able to receive the information clear. Therefore to achieve this task a singer can shift his or her language based on communicative speech competence while in sync with the listeners. In this matter, low variety becomes high variety and vice versa. Hence the cycle keep altering when majority of language speaking community demands a language that makes the listeners more relatable. Such as, singer singing in *Am-beng* dialect for *Am-beng* audience, *A-we* song for majority *A-we* speaking audience, Hindi language for non Garo speakers and English for General and formal situation is a case of Double Overlapping Diglossia. Each language becomes interchangeably High Variety of Dialect and Language while representing the majority speaking community and High Variety language becomes Low variety in absence of majority speakers.

Table 4: Sub-Tribes and Varieties of Language

Sl.no	Diglossian Districts	H-Variety	L-Variety
1	West Garo Hills	<i>A we, Am beng</i> (bi-lingual diglossia)	<i>A ronggani</i> and <i>A bimani Am beng</i> , <i>Matabeng, A we</i>
2	East Garo Hills	<i>A we</i>	<i>Chisak, Garaganching, Megam</i>
3	South Garo Hills	<i>A we, atong</i> (bi-lingual diglossia)	<i>Am beng, Atong, Dual, Ruga, Chibok</i>
4	North Garo Hills	<i>A we</i>	Double nested diglossia-A we
5	Southwest Garo Hills	<i>A we</i>	<i>A ronggani Am beng, A bimani Am beng</i>
6	Bangladesh	<i>Dual</i>	<i>A bimani Am beng, Atong,</i>
7	Khasi Hills	<i>A we</i>	<i>Am beng, Dual, A we-double nested Diglossia</i>

C. Double Nested Diglossia or Linear Polyglossia.

The existence of two languages within a single dialect with a distinction of H-variable and L-variables of languages can be found in Garo society. Most forms of folk songs are sung in their respective dialects considered L-variables. However, the double-nested diglossia concept among the *Am beng* has been found to have interesting variables used between the inter-subtribe nesting a set of dialects within the language both used for singing and communication within the culture. Within the Garo languages, *Am beng* has been considered an L- variety of languages. However, *Am beng* dialects have varieties within the variety or dialects with a function given importance with a status when a dialect is utilized among the group of *Am beng* varieties. In this case, *Am beng* has been classified into two varieties, i.e. *A ronggani Am beng* and *A bimani Am beng* (Table 4). Each varieties have their style of singing and structural patterns in the formation of phrases and forms of songs. A language substitution is used as multilingual for communication for a particular purpose. For instance: Among the villagers, individuals use *A bimani Am beng* as a vernacular language while for general conversation in the Garo community, *A ronggani Am beng* dialect becomes a priority. Similarly, in the music configurations, *A ronggani Am beng* have their ways of singing with forms of songs such as *ajea, doroa, grap mangtata*, and *guri rodila* as their forms of singing. While *A bimani Am beng* commonly perform forms of songs like *rere, serinjing*, and *gayok*.

Language of Choice

The language of choice in Garo folk music plays a significant role in propagating the message to the listener. Misrepresentation of a message in a song is of concern when the right language is not selected by the sender. Similarly, acknowledgment by the listener of the understanding of a shared message is as important as the sender. Differences in language during the process of communication will only result in deficient and fragmented information. In many cases, barriers in language often distort the meanings shared, and eventually, messages are misinterpreted by listeners. Therefore, accessibility and uniformity of language in the process of communication is a confronted necessity in the traditional music of a Garo community.

The language of choice for folklorists and singers depends on what language most audiences speak and can be an opening to craft the disposition of their understanding. Following the majority, folk singers and folklorists can budge to the type or genres and forms of folk song and language that are popular in the region (as shown in Table 5). For example, if a folk singer is from an *A rongga Am beng* community

amidst a we speaking margin, a singer in spontaneity can shift his mode of communication to *A-we* dialect version of a folk song. This will positively enable listeners to have a clear shared message from the type of songs. Conversely, if a communicator uses auto-dialect, a song may be entertaining but the intended messages to the audience will be lost. Hence, the choice of language can be precisely impressive with the right dialect or alter the accuracy of a song’s content during a traditional communication process.

Table 5: Relevance of A-we Dialect in Forms of Songs and Other Dialectical Situation

Sl. No.	Forms of Songs	Dialect Usage (A-we)	Value of Variety in Household	Language Choice & Speech Competence
1	<i>Doroa</i>	L	H	<i>Am-beng</i>
2	<i>Ajea</i>	L	H	<i>Am-beng</i>
3	<i>Grapmangtata</i>	L	H	<i>Am-beng</i>
4	<i>Gonda</i>	L	H	<i>Atong</i>
5	<i>Chera</i>	L	H	<i>Atong</i>
6	<i>Harara</i>	H	H	All Dialects
7	<i>Serinjing</i>	H	H	All Dialects
8	<i>Mumua</i>	L	H	All Dialects
9	<i>Ohoma</i>	L	H	<i>Am-beng</i>
10	<i>Katta agana</i>	H	H	All Dialects
11	<i>Krita</i>	L	H	<i>Am-beng</i>
12	<i>Guri rodila</i>	L	H	<i>Am-beng</i>
13	<i>Rere</i>	L	H	<i>Dual</i>

Speech Competence in Folk Music

One of the prominent identifications that represents the Garo community other than tangible heritage is the mosaic music culture of the Garos. The Garos have a rich music culture with various forms of music language and traditional means of communication shared within a specific group of individuals leading a folk life. Table 5 depicts how the Garos can pick forms of languages depending on the genres of folk music they want to play and the situation. Linguistically, the language of choice can be from within Garo dialects and folk genres or forms of music language where information is deciphered in music and notes in phrases instrumentally. Speech competence becomes significant in imparting knowledge through folk songs and recitation. Knowing when to select the dialect or choice of language would provide credit to his/her knowledge of the art of music and the attention of the audience in the traditional Garo society. Furthermore, the favour of the listener is moved towards the direction where the speech competence using the medium of music or folksongs can comprehend the dialect that everyone understands in a multicultural or multilingual community within the complexities of dialectic varieties.

Other Languages: Languages like *Dachi* or *Damani ku-rang* and *Ku-pangpil* are other linguistic mediums that the Garos use as a symbolic form of communication incorporating music through phrases and encrypted messages. One of the characteristics of *Ku-pangpil* in the traditional Garo society is the use of syntactical morphology and semantics in their tonal speech. While, *Dachini ku-rang* are verbal notations of Garo Traditional Musical Instruments (GTMI) planned cognitively for manipulation of phrases into an organized sound patterns for communication between percussionists, dancers and other

musicians. It is one of the forms of Garo paralinguage commonly used among folk artists, dancers and percussionists in Garo Hills. Whereas, *Ku-pangpil* is an unusual linguistic signature of the Garos in which languages or dialects are spoken backward; also observed the children, young men and women prominently applying in some of the casually composed banter songs. The origin is unknown but it began as a means for laughter, testing one's reverse language skill and pace. Today *Ku-pangpil* is used as a language medium for sharing information in discreet, teasing songs, private dialogues and conversations amongst the language speaking community. Each of Garo sub tribes when spoken in combination between their dialect and *ku-pangpil* becomes a newer version of language. The study has also observed that the situation of diglossia in this scenario becomes complex in terms of understanding the language despite of speech competence and choice of language. Example:

Damani Ku-rang

“Chrang kmit, chrang kimit”

“Ding dadi dokata nomil ja teng rimita”

These are variables of phrases containing syntax and semantics communicated through a musical instrument. Each syllable signifies individual beat and the sound of the beat is phonologically instrumentalized through performance mimicking the pronunciation of words. The hardness and softness or the fastness and slowness of the pitch depend on the morphology of the variables. The sentence is semantically composed although few words do not relate to each other morphologically. The phrases of *Damani ku-rang* are the representation of beats carefully structured to sound as it is pronounced when performed. Each syllable contains a break and a gain which can be adapted to control the pitch, dead note and beat of musical instruments. The example shown above is a breakdown of music notation extracted from phrases. These beats are organized as a pattern and sequence of beats based on the phonemes of syllables. The low pitch on the Left Hand Side (LHS) are syllables with vowels ‘o, a, i’ and accompanied by any consonants that sounds low and deep tones such as D, M, R, J, N etc., while the high pitch on the Right Hand Side (RHS) of the *dama* (elongated Garo drum) is organized by sharp toned syllable sounds such as ‘ka, ta, teng etc., and the muted tone or dead notes are represented by ‘kimit, chrang, etc. All these individual units of sound collectively behave as the language of the Garo musical instrument and each pattern of beats can be recognized as phrases and vice versa.

Ku-pangpil

In this form of language, linguistic variables are designed and managed to escape other listeners from knowing the messages shared. It is a language with characters shuffled and an invented syllable alternatively added in place of few specific characters to confuse the other dialect-speaking community. The linguistic aspects of *ku-pangpil* has not been studied by any researchers or linguists as it is rarely found only in few pockets of Garo villages that continue to speak the language.

The Transition of A·we Dialect to a High Variety of Languages

A frequently spoken dialect used as a general language is *A·we* dialect while the root of ritualistic rites and the origin of oral literature is *Am-beng* dialect. The influence of *A·we* dialect in academic literature and general speaking language is believed to have progressed from the religious writings (Garo version Bible) and early education from North Garo Hills dating back to the late 1880s. One of the concrete factors that fasten *A·we* language evolves into a standardized language is because of the boundary shared with Assam and its accessibility to all forms of trade, institutions, and civilization. Gradually, the same dialect became an official language for different functions in Garo society. Songs and lyrics, literature, conversation, and many other features of the *A·we* dialect became a part of the modern Garo oral

tradition. This carved out intellectuals, writers, and the future of *A·we* community at a rapid pace. Whereas the remaining Garo dialects merely evolved slower due to their bio-demographic disadvantages and stretch of a·we dialect dominating in almost every linguistic aspect of the Garo society, it became a part of their culture while few dialects became endangered and extinct from the dialectic society of Garo Hills.

CONCLUSION

Music and folk narrative form and function as a socialization process (unit) for testing one's ability to understand, demonstrate, and share knowledge of interrelated social experiences of common cultural traits and configurations. A folklorist, folk singer, narrator, and an expert in traditional rituals and recitation is co-related with social-cultural complexity. This means he/she receives social importance and status regarding cultural integration, political coordination, and judicial participation for lawful decision-making in the village and social gatherings or recreations. His/her worthiness of verbal communication and recitation of oral heritage makes him an important delegate from the rest of the villages. To achieve all these characteristics, understanding the essence of diglossia by a folklorist, soloist or vocalist needs to have a presence of mind for speech competence and the language of choice that one needs to apply in a gathering where there is a culmination of varieties of dialects or languages.

However, there are also a few limitations, that have made diglossia decline in society due to the commercialization of language and usage of one language that is the *A·we* dialect in every situation. With fast globalization and a single platform for folk musicians, the language required for transcription becomes homogenous to make the mass audience understand the communication process. I have also found that the traditional Garo society is a bilingual and a diglossie society despite geographical isolation and segregation. Most problems have been found in the urban areas where multilingualism is a prominent culture but at the same time versatility in dialects seems to diminish due to the domination of English and *A·we* languages in educational and other official notifications. Hence, it is of utmost significance to conduct further research on the above-specified subject as there are limitations in the paper in context to musical notation, statistical, and technical and structural formations of the suggested dialectical society of Garo Hills.

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