

Lingual Aspects in Library and Information Services of French Communications in Chandernagore

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Abstract

This study examines the linguistic aspects of library and information services in the unique context of Chandernagore, a former French colony in India. The main objective is to analyze how the French language is used in local libraries to preserve cultural heritage and facilitate access to resources. Chandernagore, a historic stronghold of French culture in India, boasts a rich linguistic and cultural heritage. Libraries in the region play a vital role in transmitting this heritage through French language collections and information services. However, the effectiveness of these services largely depends on linguistic clarity and their accessibility to a bilingual or predominantly non-French speaking audience. This study contributes to a better understanding of the linguistic challenges and proposes solutions to improve communication and accessibility. The study is based on qualitative and quantitative analysis. Direct observations of library services and semi-structured interviews with staff and users were conducted. Documents such as catalogues, posters and user guides were linguistically analyzed to assess their clarity, coherence and appropriateness to the audience. The results show that although the libraries in Chandernagore are trying to promote the French language, they face challenges such as the use of non-translated technical terms, complexity of sentences and a scarcity of bilingual materials. A majority of the users expressed the need to simplify the terminology and increase the availability of translations in Bengali and English. These results highlight the need for appropriate linguistic strategies to balance heritage preservation and accessibility.

Keywords: Chandernagore, Library, French Language, Information Services, Cultural Heritage, Language Accessibility.

Introduction

Chandernagore, a small town in West Bengal, India, holds a special place in history due to its past as an old French territory in India. Until its formal integration into the Indian Union in 1950, Chandernagore was a thriving center of French culture, and its institutions, particularly its libraries, continue to reflect this legacy. Today, these libraries play an important role in preserving French cultural and linguistic traces, housing valuable collections and serving as bridges between the colonial past and contemporary r

realities.

Before we get into the main topic, it would be better to spend some time on a short presentation of the historical background of the city.

The city is bounded on the north by *Chinsurah*, on the south by *Bhadreswar*, on the east by the *Hooghly River* and on the west by the *Saraswati River*. In the past, the *Saraswati River* served as the main shipping route for traders, serving famous ports like *Altara*, *Bilkuli*, *Saptagram*, and *Bejra*. However, in the late 15th century, the flow of the *Saraswati River* weakened, while the Hooghly River became more powerful. Merchants therefore shifted their trade route to the Hooghly River, gradually abandoning the *Saraswati River* (Bhar, 2010; Bandhapadhyay, 2007). The population of Chandernagore then grew around two important temples: the *Bishalaxhmi* temple in *Khalishani* and the *Boraichandi* temple, located north of Chandernagore (Bhar, 2010; Bandhapadhyay, 2007).

Originally, the city was not called Chandernagor (or Chandannagar), and the exact origin of this name remains uncertain. The first written mention of “Chandernagor” appears in a letter addressed to the officials of the French East India Company, signed by André François Deslandes and Pélle dated 1696 (Bhar, 2010; Bandhapadhyay, 2007). Several interpretations have been proposed to explain the origin of the name Chandernagor or Chandannagar (Mahato & Singh, 2021; Bhar, 2010; Bandhapadhyay, 2007): some link this name to the semi-circular shape of the bank of the Hooghly River, evoking a half-moon (chand, moon + nagar, city); according to others, it derives from the flourishing trade in sandalwood (chandan) at the time; finally, it is also possible that the name comes from a temple dedicated to the goddess Chandi, which would have led to the name “Chandirnagar”, which gradually became. Moreover, the European traveller Hamilton mentions the city as “Charangar” in his writings.

In 1673, a French merchant arrived in Chandernagore and started a business in *Borokishanpur*, but left the city after three years. In 1688, the French East India Company, led by André Bureau Deslandes, re-established Chandernagore and established a colony. The construction of the *Orleans Fort* and the *Ghairetti Palace* marked the beginning of the city’s development. In the 18th century, Chandernagore became a centre of French trade and Clive described it as the “Granary of India”. The period from 1731 to 1741 is called the Golden Age of Chandernagore under the leadership of François Duplex. However, its importance began to decline from the 19th century (Bandhapadhyay, 2003)

Chandernagore was administered by a nominated Director General of Pondicherry. Indra Narayan Chowdhury played a special role in the development of the city. The French rulers made important contributions to the development of education and culture and helped Indian freedom fighters by providing safe haven, arms and remuneration. Although India became independent from British rule in 1947, Chandernagore was still under French rule. On 7 November 1947, the French government declared Chandernagore an independent city and transferred power to an administrative council, the first president of which was Harihar Seth. A Referendum was held in 1949 to express the opinion of the citizens. Then in 1950, the last French governor, M. G. H. Taylor, transferred administrative power to the nominated administrator of the Government of India, Basanta Kumar Bandhapadhyay. On 2 October 1954, Chandernagore was merged with West Bengal, thus becoming a full part of India (Mukhopadhyay & Chakraborty, 2003).

However, the current linguistic context of Chandernagore is profoundly multilingual, marked by the predominance of Bengali, the mother tongue of the majority of the inhabitants, and the growing importance of English as an international language. In this context, local library and information services

face unique challenges: preserving and promoting French linguistic heritage while meeting the needs of a largely non-French speaking public. This tension between heritage preservation and linguistic accessibility constitutes a key problem for the region's libraries.

Internationally, linguistic diversity in information services is a topic of growing interest. According to IFLA/UNESCO statement (2019), libraries must not only preserve endangered languages, but also ensure their accessibility for local communities. This requires linguistic strategies that promote inclusion while respecting cultural diversity. In this sense, Chandernagore offers a unique example where the issues of linguistic preservation and multilingual accessibility converge in a postcolonial context.

This work is particularly important for several reasons. First, it contributes to the preservation of the French language in a context where it is in decline. Second, it offers perspectives on the multilingual management of information services, an increasingly relevant issue on a global scale. Finally, it emphasizes the unique needs of local communities, providing opportunities to make libraries more inclusive and accessible.

By integrating linguistic analysis with an examination of library practices, this study seeks to deepen our understanding of the interplay between language, heritage, and accessibility within a distinctive cultural and linguistic context.

Issues and relevance of the study

Despite their historical and cultural importance, Chandernagore libraries face several challenges:

1. The use of complex and often inaccessible terminology for non-French speakers.
2. The absence of translation or interpretation in local languages such as Bengali.
3. A lack of appropriate linguistic training for library staff.

This study adopts a perspective that, on the one hand, preserves the French language heritage and, on the other hand, meets the need for clear and accessible communication in a multilingual context. It analyzes in depth the linguistic aspects of Chandernagore's library and information services, assessing their current practices and existing barriers. Based on these observations, the study provides specific proposals to improve the effectiveness and accessibility of services, while at the same time highlighting and trying to preserve the unique linguistic features of the French heritage.

Objective

The main objective of this study is to analyze how the French language is used in library and information services in Chandernagore and to assess its impact on the transmission of local heritage.

Specific objectives include:

1. Identify the linguistic barriers faced by users and staff.
2. Analyze current communication practices and their effectiveness.
3. Propose recommendations to improve the linguistic accessibility of services.

Research questions

To achieve the aim of this study, it is necessary to observe the answers to the following questions as a base of this work:

1. How the French language is used in library and information services in Chandernagore?
2. What are the main linguistic challenges faced by users and staff in these libraries?

3. How do libraries in Chandernagore balance the preservation of French linguistic heritage with accessibility for a multilingual audience?
4. What are the impacts of these linguistic challenges on the user experience?
5. What linguistic adjustments could be made to improve information services?
6. What is the role of Chandernagore libraries in preserving and promoting the French language and culture?

To address the abovementioned research questions, the study is structured into five main sections. The Literature Review explores theoretical frameworks related to information service linguistics, drawing on relevant international and regional research. The Methodology section details the approaches used, including direct observation, interviews with users and staff, and linguistic analysis of library materials. The Results and Analysis presents the linguistic challenges identified, as well as users' perceptions of the clarity and accessibility of services. The Discussion interprets these findings by relating them to existing theories and suggests ways to overcome the observed barriers. Finally, the Conclusion and Recommendations synthesizes the main findings of the study while offering concrete suggestions for improving library services in Chandernagore.

Methodology

This study used qualitative and quantitative approach combining several methods to explore linguistic challenges in Chandernagore libraries. Direct observation was carried out in the field in various local libraries to observe how users interact with French resources and services. This method made it possible to note user behaviors, linguistic barriers encountered and interactions between staff and users. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with users and staff to gather their perceptions on the accessibility of services, and on the challenges encountered when using documents in French. Finally, a linguistic analysis of the documents was carried out to assess the clarity and complexity of communication supports (catalogues, posters, notices), focusing on their accessibility for non-French-speaking users. These combined approaches made it possible to draw up an accurate portrait of linguistic barriers and user needs.

Literature Review

The literature review of this study focuses on three main areas: linguistics in information services, the challenges of multilingualism in libraries, and the role of libraries in preserving cultural and linguistic heritage.

Linguistics plays a key role in how information is communicated and accessed by users. According to Spink and Cole (2006), complex or poorly adapted terminology can become a barrier for users, especially in contexts where the language is not their mother tongue. This issue is relevant to the libraries of Chandernagore, where the majority of users speak Bengali or English, but where a significant portion of the documents are in French.

Sabine Little (2025) revealed how multilingual communities value the metaphorical space, via the physical space allocated to stock and events, with borrowing influenced by complex rationales. Libraries operating in multilingual contexts must adopt specific strategies to balance linguistic diversity and accessibility. This includes the translation of key documents, the use of vernacular languages in user interfaces, and language training for staff. In postcolonial contexts such as Chandernagore, these

challenges are amplified by the need to preserve a heritage language while meeting the needs of a multilingual population.

In Chandernagore, libraries represent not only a space for the preservation of the French language, but also a point of contact between different linguistic traditions, making their role even more relevant in a globalized world.

This study is distinguished by its specific focus on the linguistic role of libraries in Chandernagore, a unique postcolonial context where French coexists with Bengali and English. Unlike general research on multilingualism in libraries, this study explores the tension between heritage preservation and linguistic accessibility for a predominantly non-French-speaking community. It draws on a direct analysis of local practices, including the perceptions of users and staff, and proposes adapted solutions. By combining cultural heritage and practical innovation, this study offers unique perspectives on linguistic balance in information services.

Libraries in Chandernagore

Chandernagore, a historically significant city in West Bengal, has been a cornerstone of India's intellectual and educational heritage. Central to this legacy is its network of libraries, which have played a pivotal role in promoting education and empowering citizens during the freedom movement and beyond.

At present, Chandernagore boasts 12 libraries, many of which operate through private initiatives or local clubs, remaining vital hubs for learning and community interaction. Among these, the *Library of Institut De Chandernagore* stands out as a prominent institution managed by the Department of Higher Education, Government of West Bengal. It symbolizes the city's historical commitment to education and intellectual growth.

Additionally, four other significant libraries such as *Chandernagore Pustakagar*, *Khalisani Pathagar*, *Dasabhuja Sahitya Mandir*, and *Gondalpara Sammilan Town Library* are funded and managed by the Department of Library Services, Government of West Bengal. These town libraries cater to diverse educational needs, with *Dasabhuja Sahitya Mandir* recognized as a primary unit within this network. Collectively, these libraries play a vital role in preserving the rich literary and cultural heritage of Chandannagar. They provide a wide range of information resources, encourage active participation of the local community and keep the historical memory of the city alive. This cultural environment reflects the long-standing role of Chandannagar, where the pursuit of knowledge and the preservation of heritage have developed together and where French heritage is intertwined with local identity.

Three of these institutions are particularly notable, as they house a large number of French documents relating to the French presence in Chandernagore and India. These libraries are closely linked to the objectives of this research and serve as invaluable sources for the study of the linguistic and cultural heritage of the region. At the same time, they bear witness to the lasting impact of the French presence in Chandannagar. We will discuss them one by one as follows:

Chandernagore, a former French enclave in India, holds significant cultural and historical importance, reflecting its dual legacy in India's independence and Franco-Indian heritage. This legacy is preserved through the bibliographic collections of its town libraries and the rare archives housed in the Institut de Chandernagore, which also functions as a museum. These archives include valuable manuscripts, maps, journals, and official records from the 18th to 20th centuries, highlighting the town's administrative history during French rule and its pivotal role in India's independence movement. The collection also

features personal papers of revolutionaries, antique furniture, rare paintings, and historical maps, showcasing the region's cultural exchange during colonial times. Primarily multilingual, the materials are in French, Bengali, and English and are systematically classified using the Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC) system. These meticulously curated resources are essential for researchers, students, and historians, offering unparalleled insight into colonial history, cultural heritage, and Chandernagore's social and political evolution. Through its libraries and the museum, Chandernagore ensures the preservation and accessibility of its rich and layered heritage for future generations.

Institut de Chandernagore

The Chandernagore Museum, which also houses a Special Library, contains an extensive collection of valuable documents that are essential for understanding the historical evolution of the city. These materials offer crucial insights into Chandernagore's rich past and are particularly important for those studying or documenting the town's local history. The library's collection includes rare manuscripts, official records from the colonial era, journals, and other significant publications that shed light on the political, cultural, and social heritage of the region.

This collection is not only a resource for historians and researchers but also serves as an invaluable tool for students and members of the general public interested in exploring Chandernagore's unique role in both Indian and French history.

Chandernagore Pustakagar

Established in 1875, this is one of the oldest libraries in Chandernagore, and it plays a pivotal role in preserving the town's rich historical legacy. Over the years, the library has amassed a diverse collection of documents that serve as vital sources of information for studying the local history of Chandernagore. These materials include historical records, manuscripts, and publications that provide unique insights into the town's cultural, political, and social evolution.

The most of the documents are written in Bengali, reflecting the region's linguistic heritage, while others are in English and French, underscoring the town's colonial past and its connections to France. This multilingual collection is invaluable for researchers, students, and historians who seek to explore the intricate layers of the history of Chandernagore.

The collection of this library is an indispensable resource for anyone interested in understanding the transformation of Chandernagore from its early days as a French settlement to its integration into modern India. It offers a rare glimpse into the local historical narratives, providing the foundation for academic study, research, and public education.

Gondalpara Sannilan Town Library

This library is located in the historic colony of Chandernagore known as "Gondalpara." As an institution with a long history, it houses a modest collection of documents pertaining to the local history of Chandernagore. Unfortunately, due to inadequate maintenance over the years, many valuable documents have suffered damage.

In response to this issue, the library has recently initiated efforts to preserve and protect the significant documents related to the local history of Chandernagore.

Result and discussions

The findings of this study highlight several linguistic challenges encountered in Chandernagore libraries,

as well as users' perceptions regarding the clarity and accessibility of information services. These challenges, largely related to the coexistence of different languages and the specificity of the French linguistic heritage, are analyzed through field observations, interviews with users and staff, and analysis of library documents.

1. Linguistic challenges related to the French language

One of the most important challenges faced by users is the high level of complexity of French terminology used in library materials and communication resources. In the current situation, most of the collections, exhibitions and catalogues are exclusively in French; with no translation available in Bengali or English, non-French speaking users face clear barriers in accessing or fully understanding the relevant information and resources. This hinders the inclusive flow of knowledge and information and limits the effectiveness of library services in an international context.

2. Users' perceptions of accessibility

There is a clear diversity in the opinions of users regarding the accessibility of library services. A section of users who are fluent in Bengali or English particularly emphasize the need for simplified language in the library's communication structure and information provision. On the other hand, non-French-speaking users often feel deprived or marginalized in accessing information and services due to language barriers and express a growing demand for the introduction of French-Bengali and French-English bilingual materials, as well as quality translation services. French-speaking users appreciate the abundance and quality of existing French-language resources, which positively affect their information access and research experience. This multifaceted perspective indicates that it is essential to reassess the library's language policy and take strategic steps to increase multilingual inclusion.

3. Challenges for library staff

The library staff of Chandannagar faces significant challenges in managing linguistic diversity due to the shortage of French-speaking staff. This limitation significantly reduces the ability of users to access, interpret, and effectively use the vast French-language resources, including books, journals, and archives. This lack of linguistic skills hinders not only information retrieval, but also active engagement with Chandannagar's Franco-Indian heritage and French literature. This problem can be addressed by introducing targeted language training programs or hiring skilled French-speaking staff, which will increase the overall accessibility of the resources. In addition, the staff highlighted the need for modern translation tools, multilingual management skills, and intercultural communication training to enhance interaction with users and effectively overcome language barriers.

4. Adaptation of services and recommendations

The results of the study indicate that there is both a need and interest in adapting Chandernagore library services to address linguistic challenges. Integrating multilingual solutions such as bilingual guides and instructions, translation services, and online dictionaries is essential to increase accessibility and ensure inclusive services. In addition, it is recommended to strengthen targeted language training for staff and organize specialized training sessions on managing multilingual resources and user interactions. These challenges, arising from the dominance of the French language in a multilingual context, indicate that policies and procedures need to be re-engineered to ensure the inclusion of users speaking different languages. Implementing the proposed solutions will not only improve the user experience, but also strengthen the role of libraries in preserving the linguistic and cultural heritage of the region.

The findings of this study highlight the multiple linguistic and accessibility challenges that exist in libraries in Chandernagore, where traditional languages coexist with majority languages such as French,

Bengali, and English. This discussion section analyzes the findings in light of existing theoretical frameworks related to linguistics of information services, multilingualism in libraries, and inclusion in cultural services. In addition, effective strategies are proposed to overcome the identified barriers and expand the inclusive scope of services.

5. Multilingualism and Accessibility

The linguistic challenges faced by libraries of Chandernagore highlight broader issues in multilingual contexts, where inclusivity requires addressing language diversity. In a predominantly non-French-speaking city, the lack of translation services and multilingual materials limits access to French-language resources, excluding a significant portion of the population from engaging with the town's historical and cultural heritage. Simplifying language, offering bilingual or multilingual documents, and providing translations of key materials are essential to bridging this gap. Without these strategies, the libraries fail to fully serve their community, diminishing their role in education, engagement, and empowerment. Solutions such as hiring multilingual staff, increasing translated materials, and providing digital access to multilingual resources could enhance inclusivity and better serve all residents.

6. The Roles of Libraries in Linguistic Preservation and Dissemination

Libraries play a vital role in preserving and promoting cultural and linguistic heritage, acting as bridges between generations and cultures. In Chandernagore, libraries house a significant collection of French-language materials that reflect the region's Franco-Indian history, but accessibility remains a major concern. The lack of linguistic adaptation strategies excludes non-French speakers, particularly those proficient in Bengali or English, from engaging with these resources. Users have suggested practical solutions such as translating key documents, adapting library interfaces to support multiple languages, and hiring multilingual staff. However, the absence of French-proficient staff further limits access, as they cannot assist users in navigating French-language materials. Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach, including staff training, translation and digitization efforts, and multilingual resource development.

7. Staff training and multilingual management

Addressing multilingual challenges in libraries requires staff training that integrates technical, intercultural, and linguistic competencies to meet diverse community needs. In Chandernagore, the lack of French-proficient librarians and targeted training in multilingual management limits access to valuable resources and hinders the effective use of collections. Staff are unable to bridge linguistic gaps or assist non-French-speaking users, exacerbating accessibility issues. The absence of multilingual glossaries, online translation tools, and user-friendly multilingual interfaces further restricts access. A comprehensive approach, including staff training, digital translation tools, and multilingual resource development, is essential to promote inclusivity and enhance resource utilization.

8. Solutions and Recommendations

In light of the topics discussed in this study, some strategic solutions and recommendations can be presented, which can be helpful in making significant progress in the functional efficiency, structural sustainability and user-centered design of the relevant libraries in the future. By implementing the proposed measures, both the effectiveness and relevance of the libraries will increase, which will make a significant contribution to the improvement of the overall quality of services in the long run.

1. Translation and simplification: Implement bilingual documents, multilingual search interfaces, and automated translation tools to enhance accessibility for Bengali and English speakers.

2. Staff training: Provide library staff with linguistic and intercultural training to navigate French-language materials and assist users effectively. This training will enhance multilingual communication skills and foster an inclusive library environment for diverse audiences.
3. Assistive technologies: Use digital tools, such as online glossaries and real-time translation applications, to facilitate access to information in languages other than French.
4. Linguistic diversity awareness: Organize workshops or awareness programs for users to promote linguistic diversity and encourage the use of multilingual resources.

Conclusion

The linguistic challenges observed in Chandernagore libraries are typical of multilingual contexts where information services must juggle the preservation of cultural heritage with the need to make resources accessible to a diverse audience. By implementing appropriate strategies, such as language simplification, staff training and the use of translation technologies, these libraries can become models of inclusivity and accessibility in an increasingly globalised world. These adjustments will not only overcome current barriers, but also improve the user experience and strengthen the role of libraries in preserving and disseminating local languages and cultures.

This study highlights the linguistic challenges faced by libraries in Chandernagore, where French coexists with Bengali and English, in a multilingual environment. Key findings reveal that the French language, although a pillar of local heritage, is a barrier for a large proportion of users and library staff who do not speak the language. Users expressed difficulties in accessing resources and understanding communications in French, which limits the inclusiveness of services. Moreover, the staff's lack of proficiency in French is compounded by the absence of language training programs and the unavailability of multilingual tools or resources. These deficiencies make it increasingly difficult to support users seeking French-language materials and limit the overall accessibility and effectiveness of library services.

To improve services, several concrete recommendations can be proposed:

Translation of resources: It is crucial to translate key documents, such as catalogues, posters, and search instructions, into Bengali and English. This would make services more accessible to a wider audience, while preserving the essence of French heritage.

Staff training: It is recommended to train staff in French and multilingual management, particularly in intercultural communication and translation. Workshops on the use of digital translation tools and multilingual information management would also be beneficial.

Use of translation technologies: The adoption of technologies such as online translation applications and multilingual glossaries could facilitate access to resources for non-French speaking users.

Awareness and educational programs: Organizing awareness events on linguistic diversity and workshops on the use of resources in multiple languages could encourage greater participation of non-French speaking users.

By implementing the proposed recommendations, Chandernagore libraries will be better able to meet the needs of the multilingual user community, especially to ensure better services for French-speaking readers and researchers. At the same time, these measures will make an important contribution to the preservation and promotion of French linguistic heritage, which will strengthen Chandernagore's unique Franco-Indian cultural heritage. Through multilingual inclusion, the application of modern information

technology and targeted skill development, the library will not only improve the quality of information access, but also consolidate its position as an inclusive and culturally rich knowledge center.

Future research could evaluate the sustainable development strategies of library services in a multilingual and multicultural context like Chandernagore, methods of measuring user satisfaction, and the effectiveness of digital technology-based translation and information flow. In addition, exploring the possibilities of regional and international collaboration will provide an opportunity to further expand the scope and impact of library services.

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