

Abstract. This research investigates how identity construction shapes language maintenance and shift among the Chakma community in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) region of southeastern Bangladesh. Although Bangla is the official language of Bangladesh and Bengali nationalism dominates public discourse, the Chakma community continues to maintain their language through strategic use in various domains of everyday life. While prior research has examined language shift, forced migration, and the destruction of biodiversity in the CHT, the role of identity construction in language maintenance remains largely unaddressed. This study explores how identity negotiation intersects with language practices amid linguistic imperialism and state policies that frequently marginalize indigenous languages and cultures.

Historically, The CHT region was designated as an “excluded area” by British colonial authorities and later as a “tribal area” under Pakistan’s 1956 Constitution, but Bangladeshi government did not follow the same path (Roy 2000: 47). As an ethnic and linguistic minority, the Chakma face significant challenges in preserving their language and cultural heritage due to cultural marginalization, societal discrimination, forced migration, and state-led linguistic imperialism. These dominant Bengali ideologies and policies have justified displacement and contributed to the erosion of indigenous languages, cultures, and traditional cultivation systems (Chakma & Sultana 2024).

This study employs ethnographic methods, including participant observation and in-depth semi-structured interviews with Chakma community members, to explore how language functions as a site of identity construction and cultural preservation. Archival research complements fieldwork by contextualizing the Chakma’s historical experiences within the broader political history of Bangladesh.

Preliminary findings suggest that Chakma speakers use their language in home, cooking, religious, and other intimate domains while strategically switching to Bangla in public or formal settings. This code-switching reflects an ongoing negotiation of indigenous identity. The imperialistic stance of the dominant community is also evident in the labels assigned to indigenous groups—such as *Upojati* (sub-nation) and *Khudro Nri Goshthi* (small ethnic community)—whereas the communities self-identify as *Adivasi* (indigenous). These imposed labels diminish their distinctiveness and reinforce a subordinate status. Instead of acknowledging their indigenous status, state and media discourse persistently use problematic terminology (Partha 2024), shaping identity construction and forcing communities to continuously negotiate their place in the nation.

This study contributes to sociolinguistic and theoretical scholarship by analyzing the socio-political histories of indigenous communities in South Asia. It expands research on identity construction and offers a comparative perspective on state power, indigenous adaptation, and resistance. Ultimately, it reveals how linguistic minorities actively shape their identities and resist cultural erasure through everyday language practices.

Keywords. governmentalism, linguistic imperialism, language maintenance and shift, state policy, nationalism, Adivasi, identity construction and negotiation, Khudro Nri Goshthi, Upojati.

1. Introduction. Bangladesh is a South Asian country with a population of about 165.16 million, where 99% of the population is Bengali, and the rest belong to various ethnic groups, with a population size of about 1.65 million (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics 2022). Bangla is the official language of Bangladesh; besides Bengalis, the other ethnic communities are bi- or multilingual, as they learn Bangla from childhood through surrounding environment and specifically from schools. There are 44 living languages in Bangladesh; 37 of them are indigenous and 7 are non-indigenous languages (Ethnologue n.d.). For linguistic minorities, language is not just a tool of communication; rather, it plays a significant role in crafting social identity, maintaining visibility, and ensuring cultural continuity. This study examines how the Chakma community from the Chittagong Hill Tracts constructs their identity through language maintenance and shift in a context marked by linguistic dominance and political marginalization. Additionally, it will explore the contested topic: *Khudro Nri Goshthi* (small ethnic communities) vs. *Adivasi* (Indigenous) to identify the key factors of why the government of Bangladesh is not recognizing the indigenous communities as indigenous, instead categorizing them under the term *Khudro Nri Goshhti*.

The Chakmas are one of the indigenous communities in Bangladesh, primarily residing in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) division, which is constituted by three hilly districts: Rangamati, Khagrachari, and Bandarban. Among these three areas, the Chakmas are the majority indigenous community in Rangamati and Khagrachari. They speak in Chakma language, which is locally known as *Changma vaj*. It is an Indo-European language, specifically belonging to the Indo-Iranian sub-branch (Ethnologue n.d.). According to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (2022) there are 483,000 Chakma language speakers in Bangladesh. They live in both rural areas and towns of CHT. For education and job relocation, some community members also live in other districts. Those living in the rural hilly areas of the CHT mostly rely on a swidden agricultural system, locally known as *jhum* cultivation, and the indigenous communities in the CHT are often referred to as *Jhumiya* or *Jumma* based on this agricultural system. However, despite having a distinct language and culture, Chakma people often switch to Bangla in public spaces, not only because of its official status but also because it functions as a lingua franca among indigenous communities to interact with others who do not speak their language.

Previous studies on the CHT and the Chakma community have largely focused on language shift, forced displacement, and environmental degradation. However, the role of identity construction in language maintenance remains underexplored. Urmee Chakma and Shaila Sultana (2024) discuss the forced migration and displacement of indigenous communities from their ancestral lands and the destruction of biodiversity in the CHT region. Mohsin (2010) examines the ethnic set-up of Bangladesh, the status of its languages, the relationship between Bengali and non-Bengali communities, and the politics of disempowerment in state language policies. For example, she mentions that, in discussing linguistic politics, Raja Debashish Roy (chief of the Chakma community) argued that Bangla, as a dominant language, does not require state protection, whereas other languages do. However, state policies only protect and promote Bangla, neglecting the preservation of indigenous languages and cultures. Regarding religion, state laws promote religious harmony, but no such laws exist for linguistic and cultural preservation. Consequently, many indigenous languages of the CHT region and across Bangladesh have become “sleeping languages,” with some on the verge of extinction. Successive governments have failed to take meaningful action to address this issue.

Additionally, Bengali nationalism promotes Bangla as the official language of Bangladesh; as such, it declares that the people of Bangladesh are *Bangalees*. While “Bangalee” is an

ethnicity, other ethnic communities have their own ethnic identities, which have been totally ignored by the political authority. The Indigenous people around Bangladesh, specifically the Chakmas, since they are one of the largest communities in Bangladesh, have repeatedly raised their voices to the government for their indigenous rights and identity as *Adivasi* (Indigenous). However, to date, the government has not recognized the term (*Adivasi*) and has categorized the indigenous communities as *Khudro Nri Goshthi* (small ethnic communities). This identification has deeply affected their land rights and political autonomy; as a result, many of them lost their land due to Bengalization in the CHT division (Roy 2000). However, these linguistic, cultural, and political marginalizations have led indigenous groups to construct their own identities, enabling them to reassert and empower themselves.

Building on existing scholarship, this study offers perspective insights into identity construction and negotiation among Chakma communities in the CHT division within the context of turbulent socio-political and geopolitical conditions. By analyzing archival data and fieldwork, this study addresses the following research questions: How and to what extent do members of the Chakma community in the CHT maintain their language inside and outside their community? What type of identities are revealed from their attitudes toward using their language? How do linguistic imperialism and cultural marginalization contribute to the construction and negotiation of indigenous identity? How do state politics marginalize indigenous identity, using it as a political tool rather than prioritizing the empowerment and well-being of indigenous communities?

This paper presents preliminary findings from an ongoing ethnographic study. The analysis suggests that Chakmas from the CHT have strong intergenerational transmission and a systematic pattern in which linguistic choices are closely tied to social context and identity positioning. Additionally, the use of the term “*Khudro Nri Goshthi*” can be understood as a strategic move of the state authority, distancing the community from their claims to indigeneity. Specifically distancing them from the legal framework set out in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), including land rights and political autonomy. Within this scenario, the avoidance of the term “*Adivasi*” reflects its contested constitutional status, revealing how language is used to negotiate identity and rights.

2. Historical background. The sociolinguistic context of the Chakma community is deeply rooted in the historical development of the status of CHT. CHT has a long history of holding a special status since the British colonial period. During the British colonial period, it was designated as an excluded area. When colonial rule ended and Bangladesh was under the Pakistani regime, the CHT was recognized as a tribal area in Pakistan’s 1956 constitution. Following the independence of Bangladesh in 1971, it no longer had any special status in the constitution, even though the indigenous people of CHT repeatedly raised their voices to obtain such recognition; however, the government ignored their demands (Roy 2000). Instead, the state adopted a nationalist ideology centered on *Bangalee* identity and the Bangla language. Article 6, Section 2, states that all citizens of Bangladesh will be known as *Bangalee* (Legislative and Parliamentary Affairs Division 1972), whereas *Bangalee* is an ethnic identity (Das 2026). In addition to Bangla, there are 37 indigenous living languages in the country (Ethnologue n.d.), each with a unique linguistic and cultural identity. Although Bangladesh recognizes the UNESCO resolution that encourages linguistic diversity and multilingual education around the world, Mohsin (2010: 157) states that “the country has one of the most hegemonic and chauvinistic language policies. The state identifies itself with Bangla or Bengali and has imposed its own notions and categories of identification, development and education upon its non-Bengali

population.” Moreover, the imperialistic belief and ideology of the dominant Bengali community, along with governmental policies on language, nationality, and ethnicity, have justified the forceful migration and displacement of indigenous people from their ancestral lands. The consequence is the extinction of language and culture and the destruction of the indigenous cultivation system in the CHT division (Chakma and Sultana 2024).

The dominant community’s imperialistic attitude is also reflected in the way it names tribal communities. They are categorized as *Khudro Nri Goshthi*, which means small ethnic community; this not only obscures their distinct identity but also subordinates them. While fewer people may belong to these communities than to the Bengali majority; they have their own ethnic identities, which the state denies by regularly using the problematic term instead of *Adivasi* (Partha 2024).

The indigenous people of Bangladesh identify themselves as *Adivasi*, which means indigenous. However, the constitution of Bangladesh does not recognize the term *Adivasi* and instructs not to use the term in formal contexts. A recent example of this form of discrimination occurred on January 13, 2025. The National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) used the word *Adivasi* in the back cover of the 9th- and 10th-grade Bangla Language and Grammar textbook, but public outcry from some Bengali political groups opposed the term *Adivasi*, claiming that *Adivasi* is an unconstitutional term. As a result, NCTB removed the word from the back cover of the book (“NCTB removes ‘Adivasi’ graffiti” 2025). Although indigenous representatives repeatedly raised their voice against the removal, the government ignored their appeals. Like their language rights, their right to an acknowledged identity has also been ignored under the guise of Bengali nationalism and governmentalism.

3. Literature review. The study of identity construction and negotiation has become central in fields such as sociolinguistics, anthropology, postcolonial studies, migration studies, and heritage language studies. These disciplines examine how subaltern communities construct their identities in contexts where dominant languages control the linguistic marketplace, often granting social and economic advantages to their speakers. Within this framework, a key question arises: why and how do subaltern communities maintain their language while constructing their identity? The following theoretical perspectives help conceptualize these processes in relation to state policies and linguistic ideologies.

3.1. Conceptualizing Identity Construction. Identity is a complex and multidimensional concept that encompasses cultural, social, and political dimensions. It connects individuals to communities while also distinguishing them from others. It reflects a sense of belonging, including place-based, ethnic, and group identities (Luza 2023). Individuals construct identity through social interaction, acquiring shared values, norms, and communicative practices. Cultural and familial socialization, acculturation, and ideology shape how individuals respond to fundamental questions such as “Who am I?” and “Who are you?” While broader cultural contexts play a crucial role, family and gender socialization are also central to identity development (Ting-Toomey 2005: 211).

Overall, identity construction operates across multiple levels, including individual, group, regional, and national contexts. Similarly, linguistic identity emerges through layered interactions and communicative practices (Tseng 2020). It relies on the construction of “sameness and difference,” where similarity fosters group belonging and difference produces social distance (Bucholtz & Hall 2004: 369). Through these processes, individuals position themselves and others in discourse (Bucholtz & Hall 2005). Language and speech styles therefore function as key markers of group membership and identity (Tseng 2020).

3.2. Identity Negotiation. Identity Negotiation Theory (INT), developed by Stella Ting-Toomey (2005), explains how individuals establish, maintain, and transform their identities through communication. Identity, in this framework, is not fixed but continuously negotiated through interaction. She distinguishes between primary identity and situational identity. Primary identity remains relatively stable across contexts and includes cultural, ethnic, and gender identities. In contrast, situational identity is fluid and context-dependent, such as professional or relational identities.

Ting-Toomey (2005: 219) defines identity negotiation as “a transactional interaction process whereby individuals in an intercultural situation attempt to assert, define, modify, challenge, and/or support their own and others’ desired self-images.” INT was first introduced in 1986 and further elaborated in 2005. It challenges the notion of identity as static and instead frames it as a dynamic, reciprocal communicative process.

In the Chakma context, identity negotiation is shaped by state discourse. For instance, tensions arise when Chakma individuals identify themselves as *Adivasi* (Indigenous), a term not officially recognized in the Constitution of Bangladesh, where they are instead categorized as small ethnic communities. This discrepancy highlights the contested nature of identity and the power dynamics involved in its negotiation.

3.3. Perception Towards Identity. From a sociolinguistic perspective, identity concerns how individuals position themselves within sociocultural contexts and how they are positioned by others (Bendle 2002). Language plays a central role in this process, as it reflects and shape identity markers within a community. Identity is dynamic and influenced by various factors, such as family, peers, and social environment, which in turn affect language use.

Barth (1998) defines identity as a set of values, beliefs, and behavioral orientations within social frameworks. Identity is a fundamental aspect of personhood, and it is inseparable from culture. Consequently, diversity forms the basis of identity. Personal identity emerges through the interaction between self-perception and others’ perceptions, which together contribute to the formation of collective identity. Collective identity, shaped by group participation and solidarity, fosters a sense of belonging (Porsché 2012). Collective identity is also situated within specific spatial and temporal contexts. Time may be understood in terms of the remembered past, the experienced present, and the imagined future, while space reflects the sociocultural environment in which identity is constructed.

3.4. Language and Cultural Aspects of Chakma Community. Culture refers to the shared patterns of behavior, interactions, and understanding within a group. It represents the everyday life practices of a community. Through cultural socialization people grow up learning a shared pattern of behavior and develop cognitive model. The *American Sociological Association* defines culture as “languages, customs, beliefs, rules, arts, knowledge, collective identities and memories developed by members of all social groups that make their social environments meaningful.” Indigenous communities possess distinct cultural characteristics shaped by their historical background, economic activities, social structures, religious beliefs, and festivals, which form their unique identity (Hamid & Jahan 2015). As one of the largest ethnic communities in Bangladesh, the Chakmas also have a rich culture, including language, religion, dress, food, and games (Ropum & Arzu 2018).

The Chakmas have their own language, known as the Chakma language or *Changma vaj*. Most members of the community speak this language. It has its own script, known as *Ojhopath* or *Ajhopath*, which is a syllabic writing system written from left to right. However, due to the dominance of the Bangla language and script in Bangladesh, *Ajhopath* has become an

endangered script. To preserve it, the Government of Bangladesh has introduced initiatives such as mother tongue-based education in the primary level. Although there is still teachers' shortage due to lack of proper training and educational materials. Additionally, an organization based in Rangamati, *Ridisudom*, is working to revitalize the script and promote its use.

3.5. Language Maintenance and Shift in Different Domains. The study of language maintenance (LM) and language shift (LS) bridges multiple disciplines, including anthropology, sociology, sociolinguistics, language contact studies, and applied linguistics. Each field approaches the topic from different perspectives. According to Zabrodska et al. (2024: 01), "multilingualism leads to language contact, where individuals who speak different languages interact. This can result in either language maintenance, which ensures the transmission of a language across generations, or language shift, where a heritage language is abandoned in favor of a dominant one." That means intergenerational transmission shows strong language maintenance and decline indicates language shift.

Questionnaires are a significant tool for studying LM and LS across different domains. Domain analysis is particularly useful for documenting patterns of language use, and it is a significant concept in LM study as domain analysis helps us to identify the domains where minority languages are being maintained and the domains where they are being shifted (Pauwels 2004). The concept of "domain" was first introduced by Joshua A. Fishman (1964) to describe the appropriate use of different language varieties in specific contexts. It is an important concept in language studies that helps identify the domains where languages are being maintained and where language shift toward dominant languages occurs. Language attitudes are also an important concept for LM and LS study as it helps to classify group identity (Pauwels 2004). In the case of the Chakma community, the Chakma language is maintained in domains such as home, friendship, food, media and religion, whereas it is increasingly being replaced by Bangla in educational and official domains.

3.6. Habitual Language Use. Habitual language use focuses on speakers' subconscious use of language when interacting with others within local groups. There are numerous domains in which habitual language may be used; however, there is no fixed set of domains, as they can be flexible and subject to variation. Pauwels (2016) states that to identify and understand patterns of LM and LS, attention should be given to factors influencing language use, such as age, generation, gender, and marital status. However, Fishman (1964) points out that not all domains equally support language maintenance. In this study, habitual language use among members of the Chakma in Bangladesh will be examined across different domains such as the family, friendship, food, social and cultural domain etc.

3.7. Linguistic Power and Ideology. Bourdieu (1991) states that name has a magical and performative power which portrays authority and expresses symbolic violence. He also argues that language has a power to function as a form of symbolic capital which confers legitimacy and authority on its speakers. The controversy with the naming of *Adivasi* and *Khudro Nri* Goshthi exhibits the profound implication of language and its symbolic power. By categorizing an entire population by its size, the state continues to reinforce its ethnocentric and imperialistic beliefs (Das 2026).

4. Methodology. This research uses ethnographic methods to identify the key factors of language maintenance and shift that significantly impact the identity of Chakma communities in Bangladesh. To collect relevant data, one of the key methods employed in this study is participant observation. The initial step involves identifying key participants willing to share

their knowledge with the researcher. Members of the Chakma community have been selected for interviews using the snowball sampling technique, which is particularly suited to this research because it leverages participant referrals to facilitate group connections. These referrals helped me establish trustworthiness and facilitated interactions with community leaders, educators, and activists. Furthermore, I have actively engaged in community activities, such as attending cultural festivities, visiting educational institutions and cultural institutes, and participating in social gatherings with my Chakma friends. These immersive experiences allowed me to observe language use, expressions of identity, and interactions with the dominant community firsthand.

Additionally, in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted using a prepared semi structured questionnaire. The interviews include a diverse range of 30 Chakma community members from different professional and educational backgrounds, aged 18 and above, including men and women, elderly individuals, educators, activists, and policymakers. These interviews yield valuable insights into community perspectives on language ideology.

The life history method also plays a significant role in this study. Through this approach, the personal experiences of Chakma members particularly elderly individuals with extensive knowledge of historical and contemporary sociolinguistic changes have been documented. In addition to fieldwork, geo-political and socio-political documents regarding the displacement and forced migration of the Chakmas have been gathered from cultural institutes and local libraries to understand the community's indigenous identity within historical and socio-political frameworks and to link these insights to real-life experiences. Narratives collected from participants undergo critical discourse analysis to identify the attitudes of language users toward their language and culture. It also examines socio-political factors and governmental influences related to the preservation of the Chakma language, culture, and identity.

The dataset analyzed in this paper is preliminary and forms part of an ongoing research project. As such, the findings presented here are intended to provide an initial analytical account rather than definitive conclusions.

This research has been conducted following the ethical standards of the Tulane Institutional Review Board and as such the participants' consent was obtained prior to data collection. All linguistic data has been anonymized to protect the privacy of the participants.

5. Data Analysis. Preliminary findings of the study show that identity construction plays an important role in Chakma language maintenance. Chakma is strongly used in domains such as home, friendship, food, religion, and festivals, while in education, official institutions, workplaces, and greetings, people code-switch to the Bangla language.

5.1. Family, Friendship, and Neighborhood Domains. According to Pauwels (2004: 730–731), “the ultimate survival of a language ... depends on intergenerational transfer.” If a family practices their first language with their children, and children grow up interacting with their grandparents and relatives, intergenerational transmission becomes stronger. This is particularly important for minority languages, where people cannot practice their language outside the home domain. In the case of the Chakma community, almost all participants mentioned that they speak Chakma with their children and strongly encourage them to do so, not only within the family but also with relatives, grandparents, friends, and neighbors from their community. In Khagrachari, where I conducted my fieldwork, the setting was rural and predominantly Chakma, making it easier to maintain the language in family, friendship, and neighborhood domains. Even in Rangamati and Bandarban Sadar Upazila, where Chakma, other indigenous communities, and Bengali people live side by side, people consistently said that they strongly teach their children

Chakma while also teaching Bangla so that they do not fall behind in school or in other social settings.

5.2. Food. The Chakmas have a distinct cuisine. Their culinary tradition differs from the Bengali culinary system but shares similarities with the other indigenous communities in CHT. They strongly maintain their dietary tradition and go to the Chakma Bazaar, which usually sits once a week in Rangamati, Khagrachari and Bandarban Sadar, to buy vegetables and other items, including pork, shrimp paste, and various kinds of dried fish such as shark, squid, stingray, etc. These items are usually unavailable in the Bengali bazaar because they are not part of the Bengali culinary system. In the food domain, speakers predominantly use their language to describe their culinary items, since some are not available in Bengali cuisine. However, because of the growing Bengali population and markets in the CHT, Chakmas are also accustomed to Bengali curries and dishes and cook them daily using Bengali recipes. Some of the item names are nativized into the Chakma language, such as *begun ton* (eggplant curry) and *suguni horbo* (mashed dry fish), while others are adopted directly from Bangla, such as polau and biriyani, etc.

Their staple food is rice, typically accompanied by boiled vegetables and spinach, along with mashed pepper and fermented fish known as *sidol*. *Sidol* is an important element of their cuisine. They consume various types of boiled wild vegetables with *sidol*. Usually, they purchase *sidol* from local Chakma bazaar. Community members who live outside CHT either bring traditional items from the CHT or try to find indigenous shops in larger cities such as Dhaka or Chittagong to buy traditional food items. They have distinct names for their dishes, such as *pajon* for mixed vegetables and *kuro ehra* for chicken curry, where *kuro* means chicken and *ehra* means curry. During festivals they prepare traditional dishes such as *pajon* and different types of traditional rice cakes, along with other fusion dishes such as chotpoti, biriyani, polau, and sweets.

5.3. Religion. Chakmas are the followers of Theravada Buddhism. The Chakma *vantes* (monks) in Rangamati speak Chakma during *deshona* (advising) to their disciples and when communicating with community members. However, during prayer, they use Pali as their sacred language. On the other hand, Chakma members also speak Chakma with the Chakma *vantes* and other Chakma people in the temple.

People from Bandarban and Khagrachari speak Chakma when visiting local Chakma Buddhist temples, but when they go to larger temples in towns, they usually speak Bangla, as many people there belong to other indigenous communities or the Bengali Buddhist community.

5.4. Educational Domain: Bangla is the medium of instruction in public schools. When Chakma children begin school, they need to learn Bangla to cope with the academic environment. Parents therefore start teaching Bangla from an early age so that their children can understand and interact with people outside their community.

5.5. Official Institutions: In official institutions such as government offices, courts, and hospitals people use Bangla, as the majority of individuals in these settings are Bangla speakers. In doctors' chambers, if the doctor is Chakma and speaks Chakma, patients also use Chakma during interaction.

5.6. Greeting. Greeting is an important element of a language. To document a language, it is essential to document the greeting system of the community. The Chakmas have their own distinct greeting system and expressions, but these are gradually being replaced by Bangla greetings. Most people use *Namashkar* or *Assalamualaikum* to greet others. However, nowadays

some members are encouraging others to use their own traditional greeting, such as, *juju*, which is equivalent to *Namashkar* or hello, and *pathuru turu* means good luck.

5.7. Adivasi vs. Khudro Nri Goshthi: Both in open-ended and close-ended questions, as well as in random conversations, community members never identified themselves as *Khudro Nri Goshthi*, stating instead that they are *Adivasi*. They argued that the state uses this term to neglect their rights of indigeneity and to control their lives, which not only makes them feel negatively valued but also contributes to the marginalization of their indigenous identity. This marginalization affected their indigenous rights, including land rights, language and cultural preservation, and political autonomy. The state also declared *Adivasi* is an unconstitutional term and instructed not to use the term in public and even in media settings (Partha 2024).

6. Discussion. Sociolinguistics of identity focuses on how individuals' position or construct themselves in sociocultural contexts and how they are positioned or constructed by others (Bendle 2002) using language and considering all the factors that constitute identity markers for each speech community members. Different circumstances (parents, classmates, and locality) can impact a person's identity at different stages of life. These elements may also affect how a person uses language. The preliminary findings of this study suggest that the Chakma community in CHT has strong intergenerational transmission and practices its language particularly within intra-community and culturally embedded domains. For example, Chakma is used during family interactions, cultural festivals, and religious practices. Pauwels (2004) mentions, intergenerational transmission and children's use of their native language to interact with their surrounding are crucial to the survival of a language. In the case of the Chakma, members of this community who live in CHT strongly maintain their language and are proud of their ethnic identity. They believe that it is their duty to maintain their language and to teach their children their mother tongue out of respect for their ancestors and ethnic pride. Ting-Toomey (2005) states that cultural and familial socialization are crucial in shaping linguistic ideology, which defines the core questions of "who am I?" and "who are you?" and plays an important role in identity development. By maintaining the language in family and social domains, the community constructs its ethnic or cultural identity while simultaneously building a positive ideology amid Bangla dominance.

However, the use of Chakma is considerably limited outside the community. Studies across domains reveal that Chakma is largely restricted in educational and official domains, as well as in public settings, where community members need to code-switch to Bangla for wider communication. Although there is a governmental initiative to promote mother tongue-based education among indigenous children at the primary school level, inadequate training and a shortage of teachers are the main hindrances to this project. As a result, the Chakma people adopt a domain-based linguistic distribution, maintaining their language in private and community-centered domains while shifting to Bangla in formal and public settings. This pattern reflects both structural constraints and strategic adaptation in the language maintenance and shift of a minority community.

The continued use of Chakma in community settings suggests that language maintenance among community members is not incidental; rather, it is embedded in their habitual language use, which they practice routinely. These everyday linguistic and cultural practices support linguistic sustainability and cultural continuity, even in the absence of educational and institutional support. The restriction on using Chakma in public settings reflects broader sociolinguistic hierarchies. The continued use of the language and intergenerational transmission highlight the community's resilience and its commitment to language as a marker of cultural

identity. These domain-based maintenance practices suggest a strategic adaptation to existing power structures rather than a loss of language due to hegemonic dominance.

The findings of this study also support the claim of identity negotiation theory (INT) that identity is not a fixed or static entity; rather, it is negotiated across different contexts. According to INT, identity is continuously negotiated through interaction. When Chakma people use Bangla to interact outside their community, they negotiate their identity, creating a situational identity that shifts from their primary ethnic or cultural identity. This situational identity produces a relational identity in different settings: in professional contexts, it constructs a professional identity, and in international contexts, it emphasizes national identity. For example, when asked how they would introduce themselves in public settings, participants stated that they would identify as “Bangladeshi Chakma,” indicating a hybrid identity that shifts from community-based identification. This hybrid identity is not simply a result of assimilation but a strategic response to competing social and political demands. By maintaining and shifting between different linguistic and cultural practices across contexts, community members actively manage their positions within a broader sociopolitical and cultural landscape.

The politics of naming further demonstrates the role of language in identity politics. Indigenous communities in Bangladesh are identified as *Khudro Nri Goshthi* (small ethnic communities) in the constitution instead of *Adivasi* or indigenous, whereas these communities identify themselves as *Adivasi*, rejecting the state-imposed label. Their self-identification aligns with the United Nations’ definition of indigenous peoples “Indigenous peoples share a historical continuity with a given region prior to colonization and a strong connection to their lands. They maintain, at least in part, distinct social, economic, and political systems. They have distinct languages, cultures, beliefs, and knowledge systems. They are determined to maintain and develop their identity and distinct institutions, and they form a non-dominant sector of society” (United Nations n.d.). The Chakma community, along with other indigenous communities in Bangladesh, shares historical continuity with their homeland prior to colonization and maintains distinct agricultural and social systems different from the majority Bengali population. They have their own language, cultural systems, beliefs, and administrative structures governed by community leaders. However, since the constitution does not allow the term *Adivasi*, it cannot be used in official contexts. This reflects the process of ideological recontextualization defined by Fairclough (2003), in which state authorities redefine social categories to align with their political interests. At the same time, the rejection of this term by community members and their self-identification as *Adivasi* can be understood as acts of resistance and self-identification.

The state’s use of the term *Khudro Nri Goshthi* carries both symbolic violence and material consequences. Labeling communities based on population size can render them vulnerable and psychologically marginalized. One of my participants asked, “Why is the government naming us *Khudro Nri Goshthi*? Is it only because we are small in size?” unfortunately I had no specific answer to her question. Some participants mentioned that when the state identifies them as “small ethnic communities,” they feel they are not valued positively. The state, in their view, isolates them, creating us vs. them distinction that separates them from the dominant community.

Beyond shaping perceptions of identity, such categorization also limits access to rights associated with indigeneity. According to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), indigenous communities have rights to land, autonomy, and cultural preservation; however, since the state does not acknowledge their identity as indigenous, it is not obliged to follow this framework. This highlights how language ideologies operate not only at the level of discourse but also in the distribution of resources and recognition. As a result,

indigenous peoples negotiate their indigeneity by adhering to state-regulated norms in media and governmental contexts, while continuing to identify as *Adivasi* among themselves and with non-indigenous friends and neighbors.

7. Conclusion. Overall, as Bucholtz and Hall (2005) state, identity is a process of continuous construction, and speakers actively shape their social positions through language practices, cultural practices, and habitual language use. The preliminary findings of this study underscore that agency within the Chakma community emerges in multiple forms. Community members actively maintain their language in private domains, thereby constructing their cultural identity, while also negotiating identity in public domains, where they adopt hybrid forms through interaction. In terms of collective identity, they continuously negotiate their indigeneity in response to state politics, governmentalism, and nationalism. These imbalances create a sociolinguistic environment in which speakers navigate competing linguistic and cultural demands, making language a key site of identity negotiation. This negotiation is also reflected in their cognitive experiences, where there is a growing sense of fear regarding their existence and rights due to the perceived imperialistic stance of state authorities. By maintaining their language and culture amid state-driven identity politics, the Chakma community demonstrates that even within structurally constrained environments, linguistic practices can serve as a powerful means to construct primary identity, sustain cultural continuity, and foster solidarity, belonging, and visibility, ultimately supporting the protection of their language and culture amid linguistic and hegemonic dominance.

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