Where Have All The Speakers Gone?
A Sociolinguistic Study of the Great Andamanese

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Abstract:

Great Andamanese is a moribund language which is breathing its last. Language death is associated with a reduction of vocabulary, reduction of domains and reduced complexity of linguistic structures. It is prominently associated with a shift to the dominant language as well as change of attitudes of its speakers towards their heritage language. A moribund language is characterized by features such as very few terminal speakers with low competency in the heritage language, cessation of inter-generation transfer of the language and a drastic shift to the dominant language accompanied by feeling of the heritage language being "inferior" to the dominant language. The Great Andamanese demonstrate the typical tendencies of such a language community with one exception, i.e. the dying language is not considered inferior to other languages in any sense. This phenomenon is exemplified in their responses to our direct questions which were found to be contrary to the reality. The typical method of eliciting data through questionnaires obtained the "ideal" situations that the community wishes to be in. The present study illustrates the sociolinguistic profile of the Great Andamanese community, combining the real and ideal situations. Our observation of the speech behaviour confirms loss of several registers including the art of narration. Out of all the genres of language use, one alone remains. It is the singing of indigenous songs. It is observed that the life of songs in heritage language is longer than the language itself. Our observation and the analysis of the responses from the community members not only bring out the factors associated with language endangerment but also the uniqueness of Great Andamanese as a language on the verge of extinction.

1.1 Introduction

Great Andamanese is a generic term used for the amalgam of ten different but closely related varieties of the same language once spoken in the entire set of Andaman

Islands in the Bay of Bengal. Andamanese is considered the fifth language family of India (Manoharan 1985) which has Jarawa, Onge, Sentinelese and Great Andamanese in its fold. However, recent study undertaken by Abbi (2003, 2005, 2006) gives enough indication to suggest Great Andamanese as a separate sixth family (or perhaps the very first one to exist in this region) as it differs from the other languages of the Andaman Islands in substantial historical and typological ways. Andamanese tribes in general, according to geneticists (Thangaraj et al. 2005:996), represent one of the oldest tribes, having a history that dates back to 70,000 years before present when the first migration of humans took place out of Africa.

Till about three hundred years ago, the Great Andamanese tribes were spread all over the Andaman Islands, divided into ten different subgroups. See map 1. Now, what remains of an entire race is a mixed group of people comprising fifty members, who are descendents of different subgroups. Once a diverse tribe with ten different subtribes speaking equally different language varieties, the Great Andamanese today are endangered population of fifty with only seven heritage speakers left. Not only their number has dwindled to an alarming proportion, the heritage language has virtually been wiped out. Out of the seven speakers left in the community no one speaks the language fluently. The community uses a variety of Hindi called Andamani Hindi for intra-tribal communication as well for communicating with non-tribal people of Andaman. A drastic shift in their mode of subsistence and lifestyle pattern has taken them away from their language as well as the cultural symbolism and semantic-pragmatic ontological constructs specific to their language. The Great Andamanese are no longer a hunter-gatherer tribe. As a result, their repertoire shows a lack of information in the areas of their cultural heritage that was part of their life not very long ago (Som, B. 2006, 2005). Loss of different registers of the language and the erosion of the art of narration can also be related to this fact.

1.2   The nature of the language and culture

Great Andamanese is a moribund language which has ceased to be passed on from one generation to the other. All the seven speakers are well over forty years of age and are not 'fluent speakers' as understood in normal parlance. It must be noted here that

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'fluency' has to be redefined with respect to the Great Andamanese. The term 'fluent speaker' of any language generally refers to a person using the language spontaneously and continuously for any duration of time in all domains and contexts. However, this is not the case with the Great Andamanese.Their use of the 'heritage language' is sporadic and not spontaneous. It needed a great amount of coaxing to make two of the 'best speakers' to converse in their own language and within no time they started taking recourse to Hindi. Only occasion where a member of the tribe would spontaneously use the 'heritage language' with another was to exclude a perceived 'outsider' from the conversation. So it can be said that the language at this stage is best used as a 'secret code' than as a standard mode of communication. Even in this kind of usage, these are usually short exchanges of words and phrases and not lengthy conversations. And this too is the case with the 'best speakers' of the language. The continuum of language competence among the Great Andamanese that we discuss below should be understood against this background. In this paper we use the term 'best speaker' for the speakers with the competence level 5 and the speakers at the level 4 are termed 'semi-speakers'. The term 'best speakers' is used for those who were found best among the few members who still use the language though not very fluently and not in all domains.

Apart from the loss of language the Great Andamanese also suffer from the loss of cultural heritage, loss of ancient practices and rituals, as well as loss of the art of narration. The few persons, who speak the language now, did not remember any native stories. It was noticed that story telling as an activity does not exist any more. Neither the mothers nor the old people of the community ever narrate any story to their children. The loss of mother tongue has very serious implications as the very genre of narration has been lost also in the contact language. Thus, the present generation of Great Andamanese never heard any story from their elders neither in their heritage language nor in Andamani Hindi.
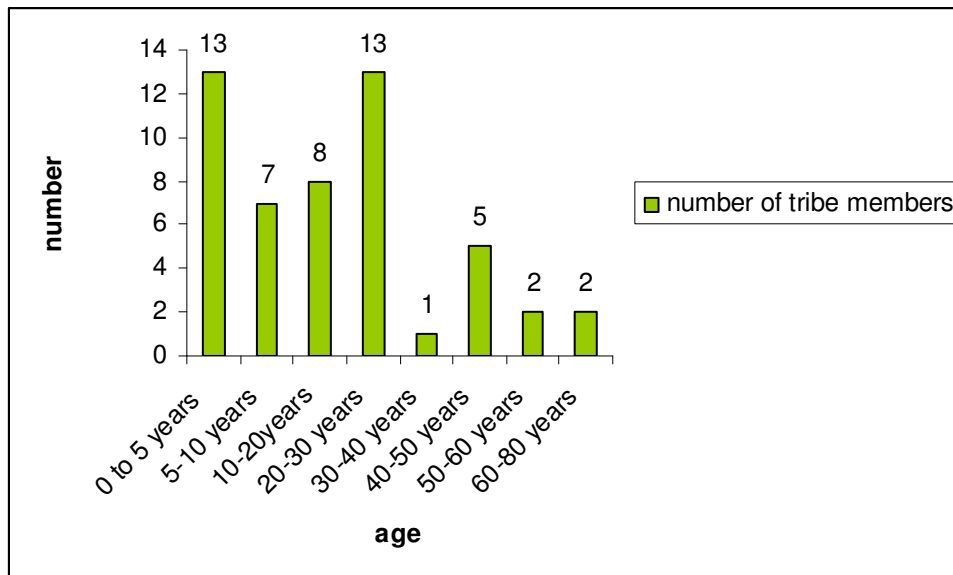
A thorough investigation of the linguistic behavior of the Great Andamanese towards their own language and culture presents a bleak picture and points towards a future when they will become a group of people who would have totally lost their language and culture, and, hence, their symbols of identity.

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2.0   The sample

Field work was conducted in the Andaman Islands from 2005-2007[1]. The current study is based on first-hand data collection from Great Andamanese living in the post Tsunami tribal reserve of Adi Basera in Port Blair and Strait Island, a tiny little island situated 53 nautical miles away in the east of Port Blair. Data was also collected from those who have joined work force in the government organization and live in the town of Port Blair. Data collection followed the questionnaire method as well as observation method. The responses were recorded on high MD as well as on digital video tapes.

3.1   Population figures, language and education

The total population of the Great Andamanese is fifty. Among these the number of children who are under the age of ten years is twenty. There are thirteen members in the age-range of twenty and thirty. Between thirty and eighty years, there are merely ten members. The number of infants, i.e. between the ages of zero to five years, is also thirteen.

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Figure1: The number of members in the Great Andamanese community

Figure 1 shows that the number of members in the old-age group is really small. However, it is a good sign for the community that there is a good number of children and young adults in the group. The increase in population in the Great Andamanese tribe had been tremendous especially in the last few years, as there were only 36 members in 2001. It indicates that the community has been thriving.

The Great Andamanese as they are known today are actually a conglomerate of various subtribes, with the largest input from the Jeru tribe. The inter-marriages among the various tribes have also led to a mixed variety of language which is known as Great Andamanese. In this variety, one could easily see traces of other languages such as Khora, Sare, Bie, Pujjikar and Bo.

Though Great Andamanese is characterized by a mixture of linguistic features of several, (perhaps ten) varieties, what we notice in today's Great Andamanese speech is a kind of levelling of different linguistic systems. Perhaps several grammatical inputs have contributed to generate the Present Great Andamanese. The linguistic system of Present Great Andamanese appears to be close to Koineization. As the language is highly endangered with seven terminal speakers, it is very difficult to say how far the language is mixed and what elements are mixed.

In spite of the representations of these language varieties, the preferred heritage language is returned as Jeru. We understand that it is commonly understood by the Great Andamanese to identify them with 'Jero' as it is considered prestigious to be speaking Jero in front of outsiders[2]. Interestingly, speakers associate themselves with father's tongue and not with mother's tongue.

3.2   Constitution of the Great Andamanese speakers

The speakers of the Great Andamanese language hail from various backgrounds, some of them have Jeru parents, and some others have a mixed parentage. For example, the parentage of the seven 'best speakers' is very varied as can be seen from the

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[2] A similar situation exists in the nine states of Hindi belt where if asked every member claims to be a mother tongue speaker of Hindi and does not mention the languages such as Braj, Bagri, Kumaoni etc.

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following tables. Apart from three of the speakers, all others have a mixed parentage, i.e. their parents spoke different languages, even as they themselves claim to be Jeru speakers. So the reality is that though they claim Jeru as their mother tongue it may be a mixed language with inputs from the various languages that they learnt in their childhood. Consider the parentage of the old members of the community. Their children are farther away from the heritage language, which some of them claim as their mother tongue. As can be seen from table 2, one of the younger speakers, speaker no. 14, has not only a mixed parentage but also a wife, who is from outside the community and speaks Andamani Hindi.

Speakers	Claimed MT	Mother's MT	Father's MT	Spouse's MT
Sp 1 (58) M	Jeru/ Bo	Sare	Bo	Jeru
Sp 2 (80) F	Jeru	Bo	Jeru	Jeru
Sp 3 (74) F	Khora	Khora	Khora	Jeru
Sp 4 (60) M	Jeru	Khora	Jeru	Jeru
Sp 5 (45) F	Jeru	Jeru	Jeru	Jeru/ Khora
Sp 6 (48) F	Jeru	Jeru	Jeru	Bo
Sp 7 (43) F	Jero	Khora	Bo	Jeru

Table 1. The lineage of the oldest and the best speakers. The number in the bracket indicates the age of the speakers.

Speakers	Claimed MT	Mother's MT	Father's MT	Spouse's MT
Sp 8 (43) M	Jeru	Jeru	Jeru	Jeru
Sp 9 (27) M	Jeru	Jeru	Bo	Jeru
Sp 10 (27) M	Jeru	Khora	Jeru	Jeru
Sp 11 (28) M	Jeru	Jeru	Jeru	Jeru
Sp 12 (45) M	Jeru	Khora	Jeru	Jeru
Sp 13 (30) F.	Jeru	Khora	Jeru	Jeru
Sp 14 (38) M	Jeru	Khora	Jeru	Andamani Hindi

Table 2: Lineage of the semi speakers (the names of the informants are concealed on purpose)

Interestingly, speaker no. 14 is not the only one who has married outside the community. One of the female members of the community, age 26 (who has a mixed parentage of Jeru & Bo) has recently married a Bengali person. She is not a fluent speaker of the language. Her competence level is 3 (see Figure 6).
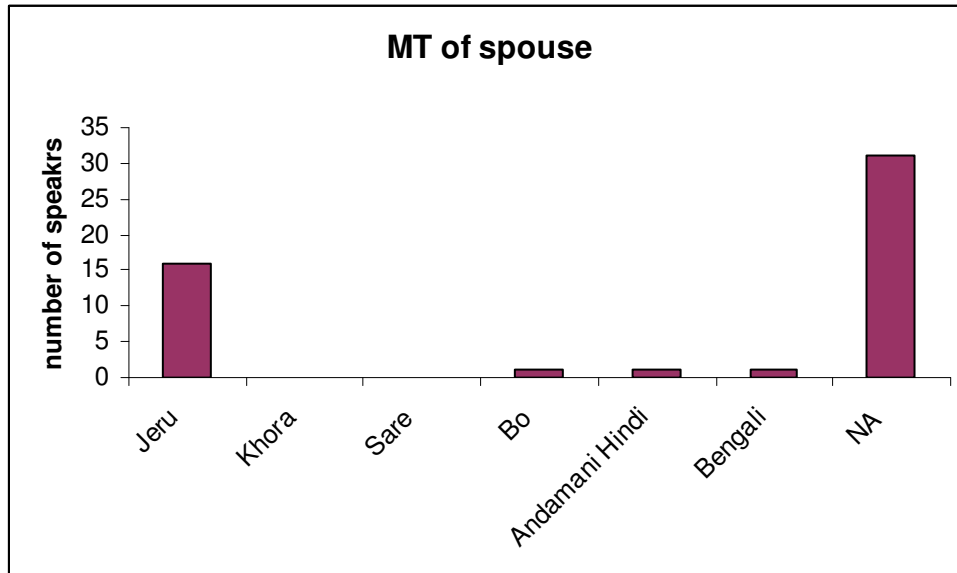

Figure 2. The mother tongues of the spouse of Great Andamanese speakers.
(NA= not applicable, as these are unmarried members of the community)

Though the majority of the married speakers return Jeru as the mother tongue of their spouse, there are a few with language background from outside the community. Marriage with outsiders has resulted in interacting with other community speakers and learning their languages. Though marriage and co-habiting with members outside the community is a recent trend, inter-marriages among different subtribes of Great Andamanese is nothing new, as can be seen from the parentage list. (Table 1). However, with almost everyone claiming Jeru as their mother tongue, the other heritage languages are clearly sidelined and ignored, however, indicates a 'superiority' complex assigned to the heritage language. Members are proud to claim themselves as Jero speakers even when few spoke it. This is an unexpected response from an endangered or moribund language community. A cursory look at the mother tongues of the Great Andamanese' spouse (Figure 2) shows the trend of decreasing representation of other heritage languages among the speakers.

The government effort to impart formal education to the Great Andamanese has resulted in establishment of a primary school specifically for the tribes in the Strait Island. Most of the Great Andamanese have studied in that school. Some of them are, at present, enrolled in the Government school with residential facilities at Port Blair. Among the Great Andamanese, literacy is very often equivalent to education.
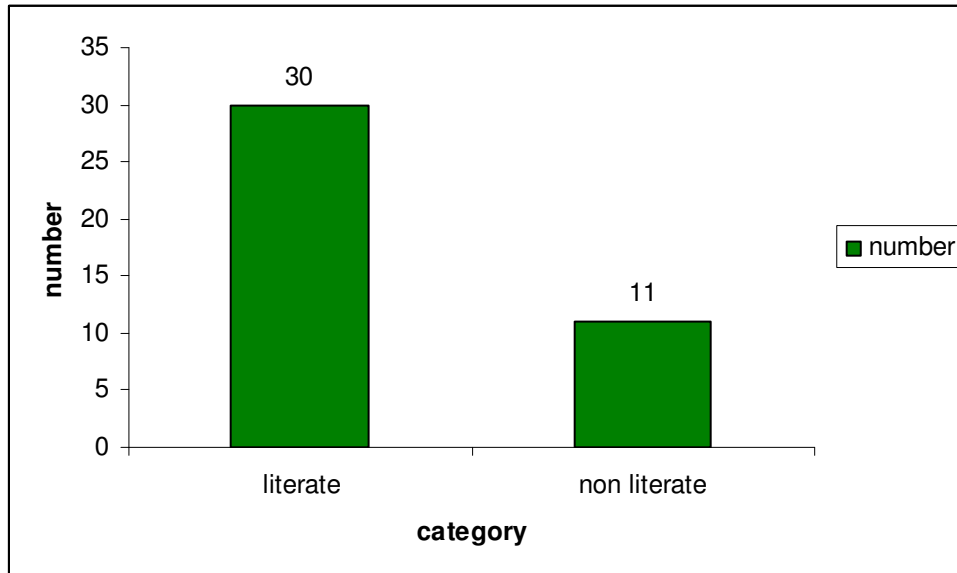

Figure 3: level of literacy of the Great Andamanese (thirty literate members also include the children who are at present in Government school).

Some members of the tribe are barely literate and others totally uneducated. The number of community members represented in the graph as literate also includes the children currently studying in primary schools, numbering about twelve. The rest are young adults. Only two members above forty years of age belong to this group. Among the adult literate members of the tribe, none have reached the stage of high school. Most of the children at present are receiving primary education and some of the young adults have studied till middle school. Eleven members of the community do not have any education at all. The illiterate group consists of the oldest members of the community with three to four young adults. It appears that community is yet to begin appreciating formal education as a system. This possibly reflects their love to learn from nature rather than from the closed walls of a class room situation.

4.1   Language competence

The analysis of the language competence of the present day Great Andamanese reflects the health of the language. There are fifty members in the community and among them twelve are below the age of five. Our analysis is based on the population that is above the age group of five, for obvious reasons. Based on the calculation of the rest of the thirty eight members of this speech community, their fluency level was judged on a scale of competence ranging from 0-5. The graph below shows the number and percentage of speakers on the scale of fluency.

Key to competency levels

0= no knowledge of the language

1 = neither speaks nor understands, recognizes only a few words

2= low level understanding, do not speak

3= phrase level awareness, but do not speak

4=semi-speaker

5=best speaker

This scale of competence is used in the following graphs as well as in the analysis of the comparative competence level of the Great Andamanese speakers.
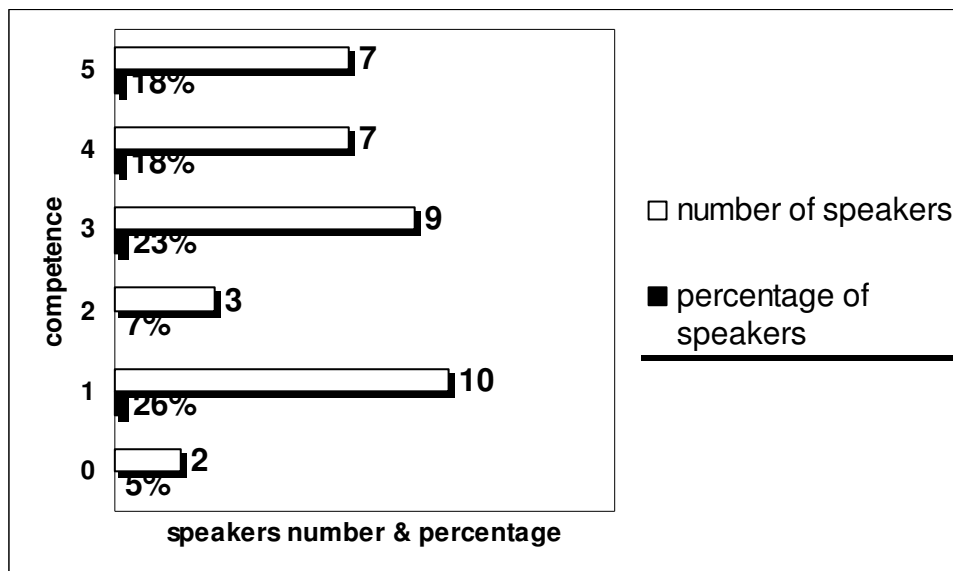

Figure 4: Percentage and number of speakers on the scale of competence

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We can see that the number of the 'best speakers' and the 'semi-speakers' is the same, i.e. thirty six percent of the community. The number of speakers in the highest competence group, i.e. level 5, is just seven. These are best speakers of the language. Next seven members fall in the next level of competence, i.e. level 4, or may be considered 'semi-speakers'. This entails that fourteen members of the community, which in quantitative terms is rather small, can speak the language in some domains and registers. Our figure shows the highest number of people, i.e. ten in all, is in the group denoted by the number 1, signifying that part of the society which has very low or negligible understanding of the language. These speakers possess passive knowledge of only some words of the language without ever being able to use them. The second highest category is occupied by the number 3 in the graph, representing the group with phrase level understanding but not speaking the language. As no two speakers speak the same variety of the language, though they all claim to be speaking Jero, comprehensibility of each other's speech is rather low. For instance, the oldest member of the tribe is an 80 years old woman, our speaker no. 2, whose mother tongue is Bo. Her speech does not share mutual intelligibility with the speech of any other member of the community. Other members somehow 'make out' what she says.

It is noteworthy that the best speakers are all above the age of forty. The mean age of the semi-speakers is thirty five. It is then clear that the level of competence goes down with age, the oldest having the best and the young generation with the least knowledge showing the gradual process of language erosion (consult Fig 7). This also clearly indicates that the language is not transferred from the old generation to the younger generation effectively. The reluctance of the younger members of the community to learn and use the heritage language is also responsible for this decline in their competence level. The graph below (Figure 5) clearly indicates the decline in competence level from the older to the younger generation.
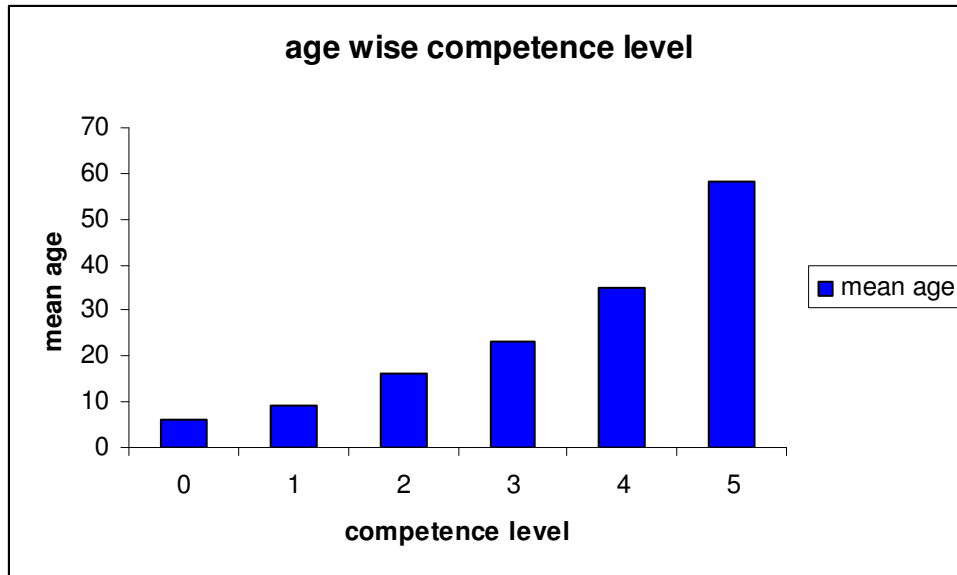
Figure 5: Age-wise competence level of the speakers

The following Figure 6 sums up the situation of language competence among the Great Andamanese with respect to the age of the speakers and their number in the community. The members with the highest competence also have the highest mean age, and their number is very small. The members with low competence have a low mean age and their number is considerably higher than the previous group, indicating the moribund status of the language. Competence level is positively related to the age factor. Higher the age group, higher the proficiency and lower the age group, lower the proficiency in Great Andamanese.
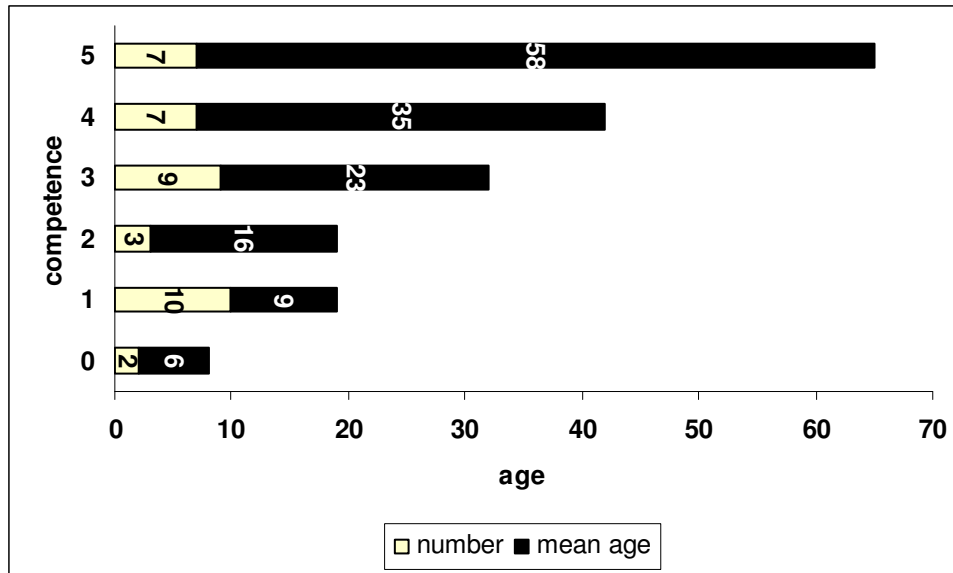
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Figure 6. The number and mean age of the speakers on the competence scale

5.1   Language use

It is clear by now that the Great Andamanese are no longer monolingual in their heritage language. The few members of the tribe (above the age of forty) who can speak the indigenous language are bilinguals both in Hindi and the heritage language. The members who are below forty are monolinguals in Hindi which they use it as a lingua franca. Some of the members of younger generation, especially teenage children also speak a few words of English and other Indian languages, such as Bangla and Tamil. This kind of a linguistic mosaic is in the background of the language of communication among the tribe members, and decides who uses what with whom and when. In the intra-community usage, cases where they use only Jeru are rather rare. If at all this situation was witnessed it was only when it was used as a secret code among the oldest members of the tribe. Another important observation has been that very few registers are used in the heritage language. For instance, none among the so called best speakers can narrate an incident or a story[3]. Hindi shares space with Jeru in most of the conversations, with Hindi being the matrix language and the use of heritage language limited to a few words

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[3] Exception was our speaker no. 1 who did narrate folk tales in Hindi after much prodding. It took him, at times, many days to complete a story as he had never narrated one in his life time and heard them from his elders only when he was a child. Other old members of the community reported loss of memory regarding folk tales. It was very sad state of affairs as a couple of speakers wanted to oblige us but could not remember anything.

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and phrases. There was a not a single instance where a member of the tribe was noticed using longer than a phrasal communication in the heritage language. Children and young adults use Hindi in most of the domains. It was noticed during the data collection that the old members of the tribe use Hindi to communicate with young and old alike. Interestingly, when posed with a fictitious situation of choosing one's mother tongue, large number of speakers opted for Hindi (see Figure 9).

The Great Andamanese exclusively use Hindi while interacting with people outside their own community. As stated earlier, though Hindi is the lingua franca in the Andaman Islands, yet some members of the younger generation also speak a few other Indian languages as well as some phrases from English. They are employed in various government departments and, hence, are exposed to the languages of their colleagues. Marriage outside the community also further adds to this language pool.
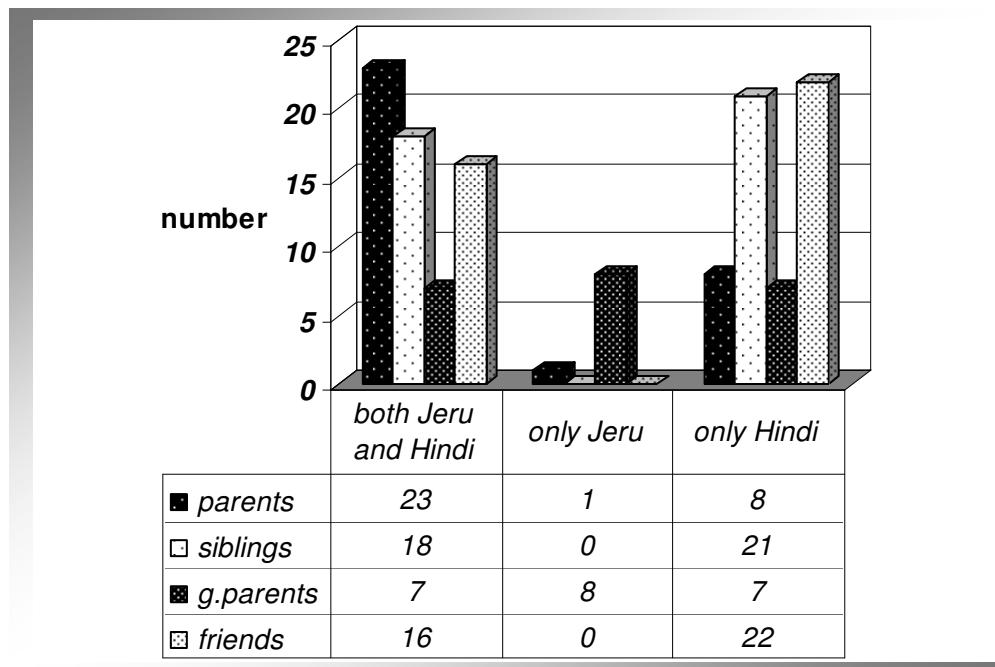

	both Jeru and Hindi	only Jeru	only Hindi
■ parents	23	1	8
□ siblings	18	0	21
▨ g.parents	7	8	7
▨ friends	16	0	22

Figure 7: Comparative language use with family and friends

The figure 7 is based on the returns of the direct questions asked ('which language do you use to talk to your parents, grandparents, siblings and friends?)'. On observation, we realized that there was a big discrepancy between their assertion and reality. The use of

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Jeru was almost negligible. Elders used some words and phrases among themselves to use the language as a secret code. Conversation between them was in a bilingual mixture of Jeru and Hindi.

This brings us to the question of code switching and mixing. It is more of a norm than an exception among the Great Andamanese to use more than one language in the course of a single conversation. Almost all the speakers switch between Hindi and Jeru while talking in addition to use it as a mixed code. However, along with these two languages, they also use other heritage languages, like Bo, Sare and Khora and occasionally English. The code switching between Jeru and other heritage languages is very rare and restricted to the older people in the community. The graph shows that the code switching between Hindi and Jeru is total and hundred percent, however, the switch between Jeru and other heritage languages does not exist. The form of Present Great Andamanese, at best, can be described as a code-mixed language (Abbi and Avtans 2006).
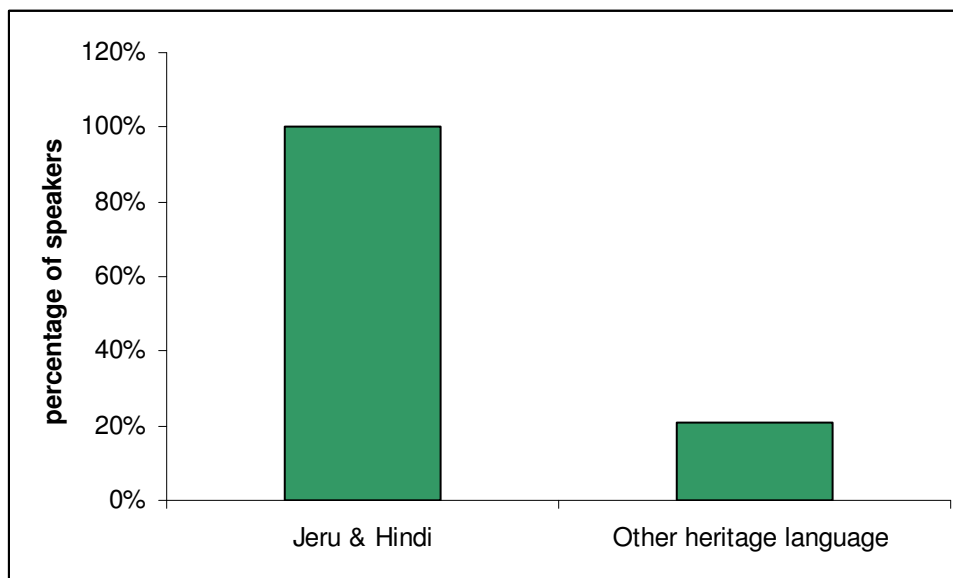

Figure 8: Code mixing between and among languages.

It is noteworthy that there are merely seven members who may be considered best speakers of the language. However, our prolonged stay with the members of the community reveals that the so called 'best speakers' cannot communicate in their

respective varieties of languages in all areas. For instance, as stated earlier, none of them could narrate any incident or happening without taking recourse to Hindi. Non homogeneity of the community, as we saw, that the existing members are actually descendents of various subgroups within the Andamanese language family and, hence, have different linguistic heritage, could have led to this awkward situation of non-use of the indigenous language. We must admit that the language situation is highly complicated and unique. Though most of the 'speakers' of the language claim to speak and understand Jeru, our observation is that this is untrue. No two speakers use the same register. Though some of them might understand some fellow members' speech, it certainly does not mean that the comprehensibility is total. Each of the speakers speaks a mixed variety of languages, though they all claim to speak Jeru.

        To summarize, the use of the heritage language is mainly with the older generation, with its code switching and code mixing between Hindi and Jeru. All the members use these two languages in free variation in intra-community communication. It should be noted that story telling as an activity hardly exists among the Great Andamanese any more. Only one member of the community could remember some of their traditional stories, as the traditional art of narration is no longer in practice.

        However, it must be mentioned here that their traditional songs and the art of singing have not been lost. It was noticed that the female members of the community still remember few old songs and they sang them for us. The number of male members who could sing these traditional songs was negligible as compared to the females. Hence, it is the female members of a community who have retained the treasure of songs, much more than the male members. This observation proves that the life of songs in heritage language is longer than the language itself. Songs in original language survive even when the language is no more in use. While the art of narration perishes in the process of language death, songs and singing are not as adversely affected. Music is a memory based activity and narration is language use based, and this difference in their cognitive process has a serious impact on their retention, as exemplified by the Great Andamanese.

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5.2 Attitude towards the language

In order to asses the attitude towards the heritage language, we asked a fictitious question as 'if given the opportunity of choosing a mother tongue what language would you choose?'. In response to this question, a large number of speakers answered 'Hindi' without any hesitation. Out of the total thirty eight responses, a staggering number of twenty nine responded in favor of Hindi and only seven wanted Jeru/ heritage language. The graph given below shows the differences in these two responses. A number of respondents in favour of Hindi are those erstwhile fluent speakers of Great Andamanese and fall in the senior group of speakers. This shows a clear shift in language loyalty even among those speakers generally thought to be the ones to preserve the language. Among the young generation, as expected, the loyalty is towards Hindi.
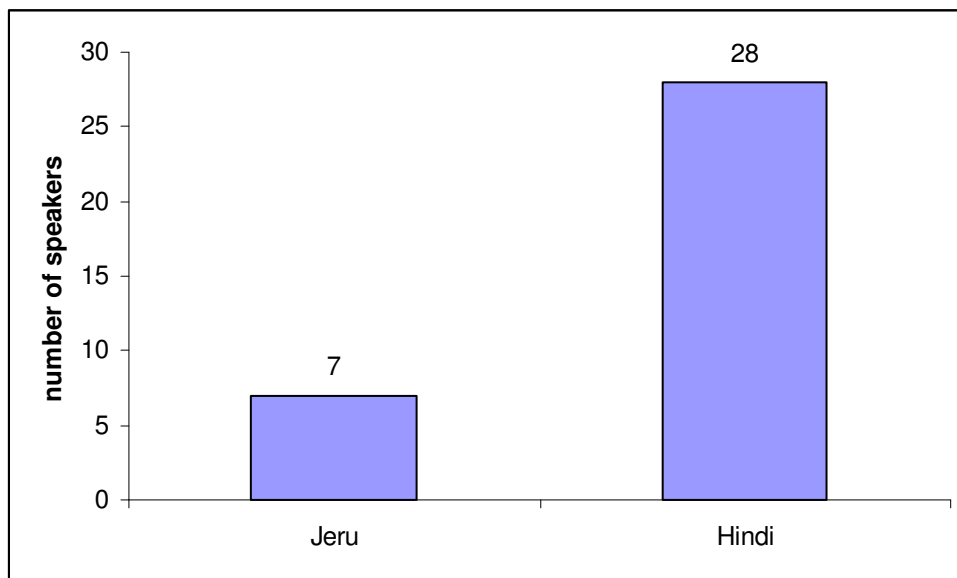

Figure 9: Choice of mother tongue

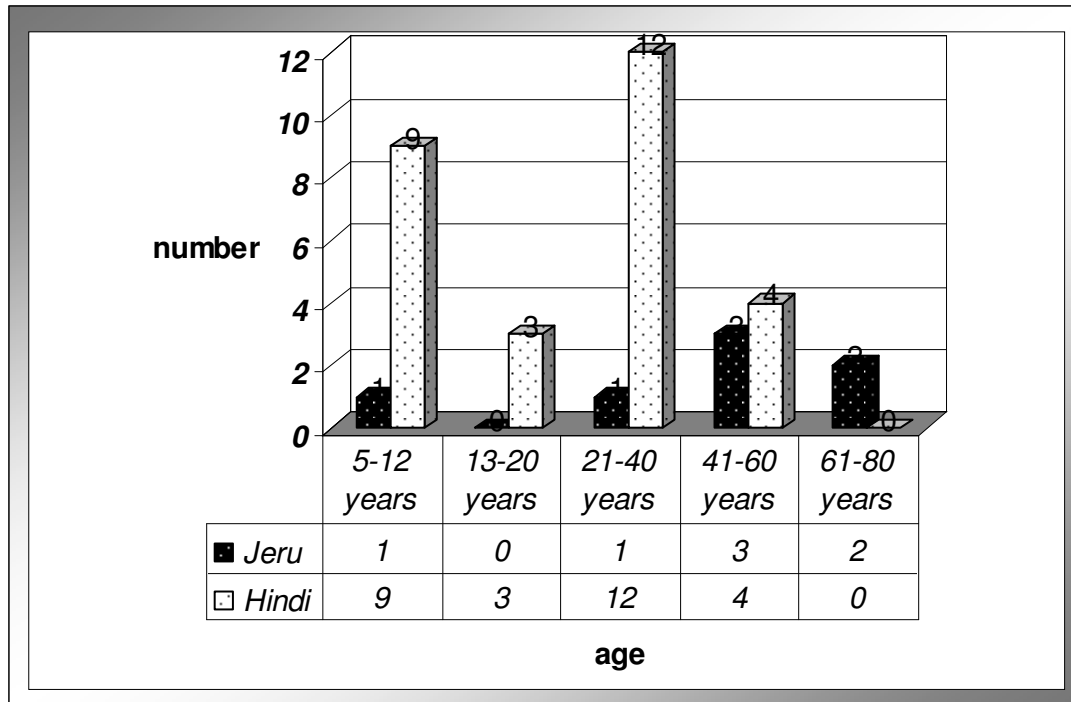| age	5-12 years	13-20 years	21-40 years	41-60 years	61-80 years
■ Jeru	1	0	1	3	2
□ Hindi	9	3	12	4	0

Figure10.   Number of speakers in different age groups and their mother tongue

        In spite of the shift in language loyalty with many people using Hindi more and
more in various spheres of life, it appears that the cultural roots of the people are still
very strong. It is specified in their choice of worship. They still worship their traditional
God Bilikhu/Terai. A small number of people have started worshipping the Lord Shiva, a
prominent Hindu God, emulating the majority non-tribal population of the Andaman
Islands. However, it is not yet a trend, not even among the young. Implicationally one
can assert that cultural and religious loyalties have longer life than language loyalty. It is
not uncommon to observe migrant communities and marginalized communities in the
world adhering to cultural and religious beliefs and practices long after the loss of
language as a communicative medium. Sporadic words relevant for such practices and
beliefs stay on with the community.

        When asked among the three choices such as, language, religion or tribe what
identifies them with a particular group, most of the respondents replied in favor of being

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identified by a tribe name or by a particular language[4], and not by religion. So it can be said that the tribe would like to retain a separate identity, even though they have lost their language and their population is mere a handful.

This leads to the question of encouragement within the community for the use of their own language. When asked whether they encourage their own people to speak their mother tongue, a large number of speakers responded in the affirmative. Their response is shown in the following graph. However, our observation is contrary to their assertion. The tribe members do not demonstrate any encouragement for the preservation and continuation of their language. No one among the speakers of the language is ready to teach it to their children. Even speaker no. 5, who is a school teacher in Strait Island, is reluctant to teach the heritage language. None of the old speakers of the language tries teaching the language to the young generation. At the most they sing in their language. This was another situation where assertion and reality did not match. The assertion may be read as an 'ideal', a situation they would like to be in.

In fact, it was noticed that while talking to children the older people automatically switched to Hindi. The fact that the knowledge of the heritage language does not give them livelihood is one of the causes of reluctance of the young generation to learn Great Andamanese.

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[4] It is important to note that the name of the language and the tribe are the same in most of the tribal communities. Thus identifying oneself by a name of a language in effect, includes the identity of a specific tribe too.
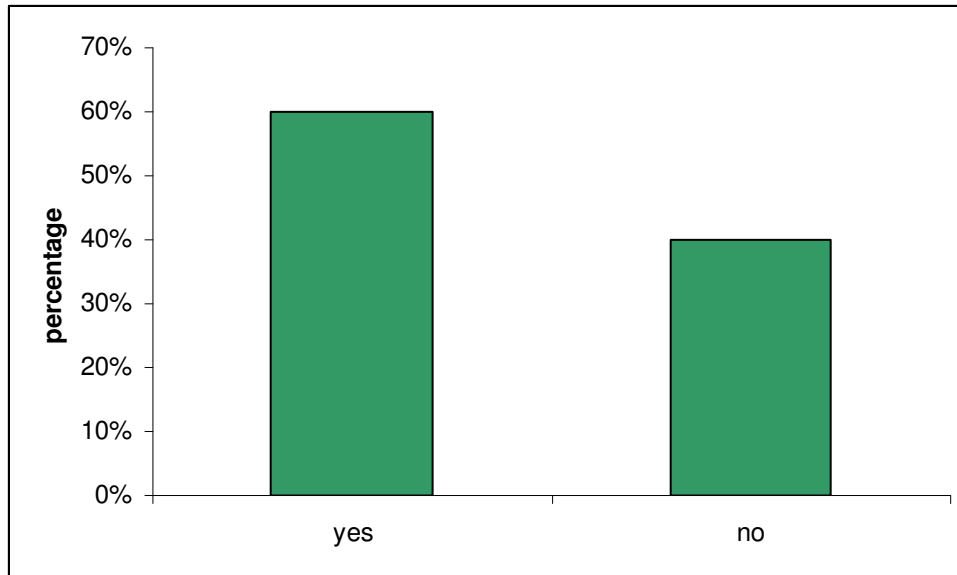
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Figure 11: Encouragement to the community to speak their own language

6.1   The complex situation

The case of the Great Andamanese language is a complex one. It is a scenario where a language is on the brink of extinction with merely fifty members comprising the entire speech community. And out of that, seven terminal speakers who speak the language with dwindling amount of fluency. The situation gets tougher because of the difference in registers even among these few best speakers. Though they all claim to speak Jeru, the prestigious language, their mutual intelligibility is not total, thus proving that they actually speak various forms of the erstwhile Andamanese languages. At this point it is not easy to establish the antecedents of these different languages, but similarities with Sare, Khora, or even Bo can be attested in their uses of words. Also the lineage of some of the speakers show that they had non-Jeru parents, hence uses of other languages such as Khora, Sare and Bo are undoubtedly mixed with Jeru in their repertoire. The case of the speaker no. 2, who speaks Khora, is noteworthy. It is very likely that she would have transmitted Khora language to her children. Thus, even though her children claim to be Jeru speakers, the authenticity of their speech being Jeru is not beyond doubt.

In spite of the shift in the choice of language, certain essential elements about the indigenous culture still remain unchanged, as seen in the case of their religion. Most of

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the Great Andamanese still worship their traditional God Bilikhu/Terai and not the common Hindu gods. This is heartening, but this cannot go a long way in saving the language and culture, as even the language used for worship has changed to Hindi with few indigenous relevant words intercepting the flow.

It can be concluded from the discussion above that Great Andamanese is a moribund language. It is also a fact that these people have lost various registers of their language, and what remains today is just one or two registers. Since there are not many members in the community left who share the same language, the lack of usage has considerably contributed to its loss. The only 'best speakers' are well over forty years of age, and with the permeation of Hindi even among the old and the 'best speakers' of the community, the very need and atmosphere to use their heritage language is vanishing. With that, education and work place culture as well as daily contact with the mainstream people cannot but have a direct effect on the language erosion scene. By their own admission, as can be seen from figure 5, the code switching and code mixing between Hindi and Jeru is the highest, far higher than the occasional mixture of few words that takes place between various heritage languages. Despite the dismal picture, the speakers reported that they encourage their tribe members to learn their heritage language. As discussed earlier this is not the correct picture. In reality there is no encouragement for the younger generation to learn the heritage language. At most, it represents a dream they cherish, the lost love, the beautiful self-sustaining life they ever enjoyed.

This absence of encouragement given to the fellow members to learn the heritage language can be seen in their preference for Hindi. By their own admission, given a choice, they prefer Hindi to their heritage language as their mother tongue (see Figure 9).

As can be seen from Figure 7, the fluency level is highest among the eldest members of the community. In conjunction with this, the Figure 1 shows the number of people in the older generation and therefore, the number of best speakers is rather low. As it is quite clear that neither in the use of their language nor in their attitude towards it, do the Great Andamanese appear very much enthusiastic about their language and culture.

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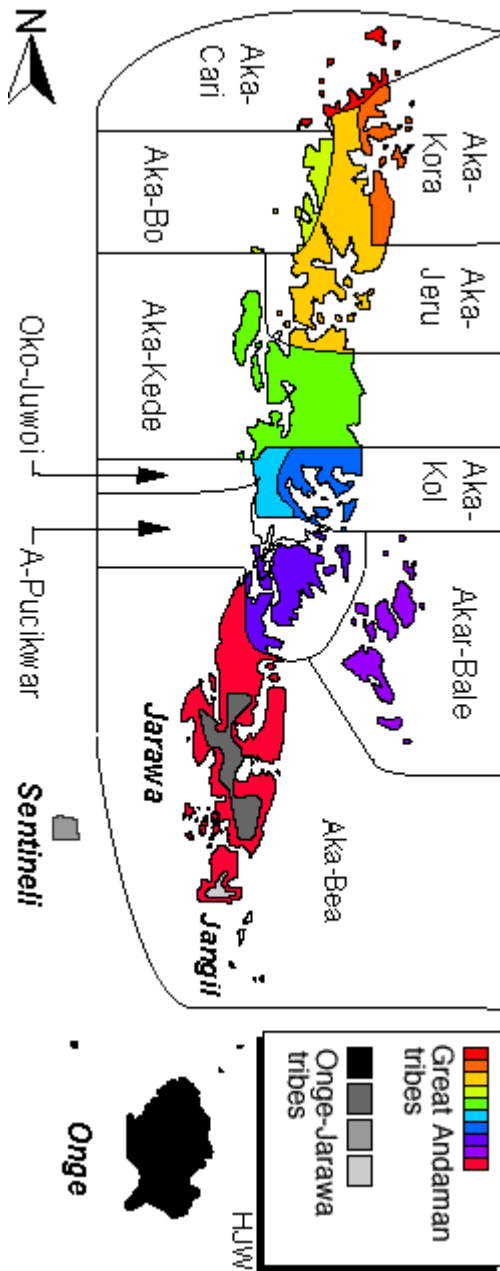
7. The Predicament

The survival and revival of any language solely depends on its speakers' attitude towards it. In the case of the Great Andamanese the above mentioned facts clearly show how short the life is for Great Andamanese as a heritage language. The only signs of 'revival' that we witnessed were in our subsequent visits during language documentation (Avtans and Abbi 2006). The Great Andamanese were motivated to speak the heritage language among themselves and with us too. However, as we are not the permanent members of the community, this interest can not be sustained. Once the language ceases to be the home language and stops being transferred inter-generational, one cannot save the language from imminent danger of death.

We cannot but agree with Blair, H & S. Fredeen, when they say 'The profile of language death generally includes evidence of fewer and fewer speakers, a reduction in the use of language, more association with speakers of the more prestigious language, an increase in the need for bilingualism and in the number of bilinguals, less and less acquisition of the mother tongue, and an increase in the age of the fluent speakers, who eventually die leaving less proficient speakers. (Blair, H & S.Fredeen, 1995). By these parameters the Great Andamanese is a classic example of a dying and moribund language.

8. Conclusion

Moribund languages are characterized by lack of will to learn and teach the heritage language. The language does not get transferred from the older to the younger generation. Another important feature of the moribund languages is loss of registers and reduced domains of use. In the restricted domains that the language is used show traces of earlier varieties in lexical items and grammatical structures once spoken. The loss of various registers also results in the lack of total mutual intelligibility even among the speakers who have retained the language. Present Great Andamanese, as we know, is a conglomeration of several varieties, as well as has inputs from two or three heritage languages. It has taken a shape of a bilingual mixture with Hindi as a significant constituent. Hence, Great Andamanese is both an example of Koine (Abbi *forthcoming*) as well as of a bilingual mixture.

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Map 1:

Geographic Distribution of the Ten varieties of Great Andamanese in the 19th Century (courtesy: andaman.org)

Abbreviations: MT= mother tongue; Sp=speaker

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