



RISING ASIA
JOURNAL



RISING ASIA
FOUNDATION

RESEARCH ESSAY

RIMMO LOYI (LUKE MÌNGKÉNG) LEGO, *Stevens Institute of Technology*

ALESSANDRO DAVID, *University of Florida*

MADHURJYA BURAGOHAIN, *The English and Foreign Languages University*

DHRUBA (TAKAR) MILI, *Dibrugarh University*

HARIPRASAD DOLEY, *Jawaharlal Nehru University*

THE YOUTH KEY TO UNLOCKING A TONGUE Imperatives of Language Conservation and Tribal Unity Among Tani Youth in Northeast India

ABSTRACT

Our study explores the attitudes of Tani youth toward language and tribal solidarity preservation in the Northeastern Indian states of Arunachal Pradesh and Assam, a culturally and linguistically diverse region. As popular languages like Hindi and English exert mounting pressure, the Tani language (with many dialects) faces endangerment, especially among the youth. This study adopts a mixed-methods approach, using online questionnaires and field-based interactions, and feedback from Tani youth, in order to assess their attitudes toward language preservation. Principal conclusions were that 63.2 percent of the

RISING ASIA JOURNAL.

VOLUME 5, ISSUE 2 (SUMMER) MAY TO AUGUST 2025.

© RISING ASIA FOUNDATION 2025.

respondents strongly support the unification of Tani language, and 61.2 percent support the creation of an independent writing system. Aside from this, 85.4 percent are convinced that a unified language would be helpful in preserving culture. The findings are significant in recommending effective strategies for the preservation of the linguistic and cultural heritage of the Tani people in the face of prevailing challenges.

KEYWORDS

Tani language, tribal solidarity, Northeast India, preservation of culture

The Tani are an ethnolinguistic native group scattered throughout Northeastern India and Southwestern China who share a common linguistic and cultural identity.¹ Tani is an endonym meaning “the sons and daughters of Abotani.” Abotani (or Abu Tani) is the supposed first ancestor or father of the Tani tribes of the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh.² Although Abotani’s history has not as yet been scientifically established, he is revered by the Tani as a pivotal figure in Tani mythology and the founder of rice culture.³ The name Abotani is derived from the words “Abo” or “Abu” (father), and “Tani” (human). Abotani, it is said, was apprenticed to the cultivation of rice by Mopin Ane, the Goddess of Tillage, and her daughters, who instructed him in the arts

¹ Mark W. Post, “On Reconstructing Ethno-linguistic Prehistory: The Case of Tani,” in *Crossing Boundaries: Tibetan Studies Unlimited*, edited by Diana Lange, et al. (Prague: Academia Nakladatelství, 2022), 311–340.

² Post, “On Reconstructing Ethno-linguistic Prehistory,” 311–340. Also see, Vajana Thakuria, et al., “Socio-cultural Characteristics of the Apatani Tribe of Arunachal Pradesh, India,” *Annals of the National Association of Geographers, India* 44, no. 2 (2024): 414. ISSN 0970-972X

³ Hage Pilliya, “The Legend of Abo-Tani: The First Man on Earth: Arunachal,” *India International Centre Quarterly* 32, no. 2/3 (2005): 22–25.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/23006002>

and in the use of instruments.⁴ In his doctoral dissertation, Tianshin Jackson Sun proposed the Proto-Tani language and presented it as the ancestral tongue out of which developed the present Tani languages.⁵ This corresponds to the general linguistic process whereby migration and time cause a language to diversify into a number of distinct languages, much as would be the theoretical process whereby Proto-Indo-European developed into such languages as Sanskrit, Latin, English, and Hindi.⁶

Abotani's offspring are believed to have formed the different Tani groups like Nyishi, Lhoba, Galo, Na/Tagin, Adi, Apatani, and Mising.⁷ These ethnic sub-groups stand out as part of the Tani language group, each with distinctive characteristics and cultural significance. There is another cognate family, the Mishmis and Akas, who are considered the Tanis' cousins as well.

Over the years, a once-monolithic Tani language fragmented into a multitude of languages, dialects, and sub-dialects, such as Bulla, Hari, Hong, Diibo, Hija, Pagro, Moying, Delu, Sayang, Dambug, Padam, Pasi,

⁴ Tame Ramya, "Agricultural Rituals as the Ceremonial Cycle of the Nyishi Tribe," *Dera Natung Government College Research Journal* 1, no. 1 (2016): 1-16. <https://doi.org/10.56405/dngcrj.2016.01.01.01>

⁵ Tianshin Jackson Sun, "A Historical-Comparative Study of the Tani (Mirish) Branch in Tibeto-Burman," PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1993.

⁶ Ricard V. Solé, Bernat Corominas-Murtra, and Jordi Fortuny, "Diversity, Competition, Extinction: The Ecophysics of Language Change," *Journal of the Royal Society Interface* 7, no. 53 (2010): 1647-1664. <https://doi.org/10.1098/rsif.2010.0110>

⁷ Mondira Borah, "Sociocultural Change Among the Mising (Miri) Tribe: A Review of Methodological Understanding," *The Mirror: An Annual Bilingual Journal of the Department of History*, Cinnamara College, Jorhat, Assam 3 (2016): 156-164.

Minyong, Damru, Tangam, Ramo, Ashing, Shimong, Yano, Milang, Bori, Bokar, Aya, Akang, Bengni, Nah, Moya, Karka, Lare and Pugo, to name but a few. The proto Tani language did not disappear but diversified under sociohistorical conditions like migration, geographical dispersal, and group contact. Although there are certain essential linguistic features among Tani languages, interlinguistic intelligibility among them declined over centuries to render them separate languages that are a continuum of a single proto language but not a dialect of a single proto language.

Language change is a natural feature of all languages, and the main cause is migration and sociocultural transformation. When a speech community spreads across various areas, linguistic divergence is experienced as speakers settle into new contexts, come into contact with other linguistic communities, and form unique sociolects. Over time periods stretching to a millennium or more, such divergence is inevitably likely to lead to the formation of languages no longer mutually intelligible, and eventually to constitute separate linguistic units.⁸ The original homeland of the Tani is, thus, a broad swathe from Southwestern China to Northeastern India with significant populations in the states of Arunachal Pradesh and Assam.⁹

Migration History and Current Status

The Chinese Tani inhabit mainly the erstwhile Sikang province (now Tibet), but largely in the area of Lhunze and Nyingchi, and they also exist

⁸ Anne Kandler and James Steele, "Modeling Language Shift, Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America 114, no. 19 (2017): 4851-4853, <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1703509114>

⁹ Post, "On Reconstructing Ethno-linguistic Prehistory," 311-340. Also see, 高发元. 20世纪中国民族家庭实录 (Records of Chinese Ethnic Families in the 20th Century). 云南人民出版社, 2003.



in scattered pockets in Qinghai and Sichuan provinces.¹⁰ The Tani-speaking groups are the majority or at least the plural ethnic group in most districts in Arunachal Pradesh, with the only exceptions being TCL (Tirap, Changlang, and Longding) district, which is Naga-dominated and Tawang which is Monpa dominated.¹¹ In the state of Assam, they are spread across various districts such as Dhemaji, North Lakhimpur, Sonitpur, Tinsukia, Dibrugarh, Sibsagar, Jorhat, and Golaghat, constituting the Mising Autonomous Council.¹²

The migratory past of the Tani people can be traced to their probable homelands in Southeastern Qinghai and Northwestern Sichuan in modern China.¹³ Their southward migration is reported to have been prompted because of the necessity to escape wars and forced labor.¹⁴

¹⁰ Sun Hongkai, et al., 门巴、珞巴、蟹人的语言 (The Languages of the Monba, Lhoba, and Xier People), China Social Sciences Press, 1980. Also see, 丹珠昂奔. 中国民族百科全书 (藏族、门巴族、珞巴族卷) (*Encyclopedia of Chinese Ethnic Groups: Tibetan, Monba, and Lhoba Volume*), 世界图书出版公司, 中国出版集团, 2015.

¹¹ 丹珠昂奔, 中国民族百科全书 (藏族、门巴族、珞巴族卷), *Encyclopedia of Chinese Ethnic Groups (Tibetan, Monpa, and Lhoba Volume)*, 2015. Also see, Baby Morang, "Migration, Acculturation and Cultural Heritage of the Misings of Assam," *Asian Journal of Research in Social Sciences and Humanities* 3, no. 7 (2013): 126.

¹² Morang, "Migration, Acculturation, and Cultural Heritage," 126.

¹³ Chen Qi Xin, "我国第一部系统论述珞巴族的民族学专著——《珞巴族的社会和文化》评介" ["The First Systematic Ethnographic Monograph on the Lhoba Ethnic Group in China: A Review of The Society and Culture of the Lhoba Ethnic Group"]. 民族研究 [*Ethnic Studies*], no. 3 (1993): 12–14. Also see, Hu, Bing Zhi. "一部了解西藏的百科全书——浅评《中国民族化大观》 (藏族、门巴族、珞巴族卷)" [*An Encyclopedia for Understanding Tibet: A Brief Review of Panorama of Chinese Ethnic Culture (Tibetan, Monba, and Lhoba Volume)*], 西藏民族学院学报 (社会科学版) [*Journal of Tibet Nationalities Institute (Social Sciences Edition)*], no. 4 (1996): 93–94.

¹⁴ 魏洪志 and 李国庆, Guo Hongzhi and Li Guoqing, "到喜马拉雅深处研究门巴、珞巴文化," ["Researching Monba and Lhoba Cultures in the Depths of the

Early Tanis initially migrated within the Siang River basin, some of whom migrated further to the west within the Subansiri River basin, and thus founded the western branch of Tani people, while the rest who remained in the Siang basin formed the eastern branch.¹⁵ Another south-west migration during the early thirteenth century led to the founding of the Mising clan who settled down in the foothills of Assam following social turmoil in Tani society.¹⁶ This arose from oppressiveness, and internal conflicts that marginalized many groups, particularly the Misings. As outcasts within their own communities, some Tani people sought refuge in the foothills of Assam, ultimately forming the Mising clan.

At present, the Tani population is estimated at around 2.17 million, most of whom follow Christianity, but there are extensive sections also practicing Buddhism, Hinduism, and animism (Donyi Polo) in the form of ancestor worship.¹⁷ For the Tani people education is of utmost importance, particularly for those living in the interior and remote villages where access to primary education remains scarce.

Himalayas”], 中国西藏 [China Tibet], no. 3 (1986): 48–49. Also see, 马宁.
“珞巴族非物质文化遗产及其保护——以西藏米林县南伊乡南伊珞巴民俗村为例,” [“The Intangible Cultural Heritage of the Lhoba Ethnic Group and Its Protection: A Case Study of the Nanyi Lhoba Folk Village in Nanyi Township, Milin County, Tibet”], 中南民族大学学报 (人文社会科学版) [Journal of South-Central University for Nationalities (Humanities and Social Sciences Edition)], no. 6 (2008): 76–80.

¹⁵ “马宁, “珞巴族非物质文化遗产及其保护,” Ma Ning, 76–80. Also see, 沙钦·罗伊.
珞巴族阿迪人的文化 [The Culture of the Adi People of the Lhoba Ethnic Group], translated by 李坚尚 and 丛晓明. 西藏人民出版社 Li Jianshang and Cong Xiaoming [Tibet People’s Publishing House], 1991.

¹⁶ Morang, “Migration, Acculturation, and Cultural Heritage,” 126.

¹⁷ Jagdish Lal Dawar, “Nationalist Discourse, Christianity and Tribal Religion: The Tani Tribes of Arunachal Pradesh,” in *Encounter and Interventions: Christian Missionaries in Colonial North-East India*, edited by S. Nag and R. Kumar (Routledge, 2023), 12.

Government statistics and reports verify severe disparities in access to education with poor attendance in far-flung regions as compared to urban and semi-urban regions, which testify to the relatively lower literacy rate of Arunachal Pradesh where the predominance of Tani people prevails.¹⁸ Arunachal Pradesh has one of the lowest literacy rates in Indian states, signaling much more deep-rooted structural issues in education development throughout the state.¹⁹

The idea of linguistic diversity is increasingly being accepted as a significant aspect of cultural expression and identity across the world. But the diversity of the Tani people is threatened mainly because of globalization, shift to other languages, and the prevalence of dominant languages. UNESCO estimates that almost 40 percent of the world's 7,000 languages are endangered, and most of them will probably be extinct within the next few decades unless conservation is actively practiced.²⁰ Indigenous languages, in this case, are not only important forms of communication but also carry the history, tradition, and natural

¹⁸ M.C. Behera, and J. Basar, "Implementation of Development Schemes and Exclusion: A Study with Reference to Growth of Education in Arunachal Pradesh," *The Oriental Anthropologist* 9, no. 2 (2009): 233–253. Also see, Md. Asghar, Pubyang Millo, and Landi Pussang Monia, "Reproductive Behavior Among the Tani Tribes of Arunachal Pradesh, India," *Antrocom: Online Journal of Anthropology* 17, no. 1 (2021): 1–10.

¹⁹ Damien Lepcha, "Arunachal Lowest Ranked State in Education Index," *EastMojo*, November 5, 2022. Accessed March 5, 2025. Also see, Bikash Bage, and Tailyang Sirah, "Project Report on Empowerment through Education: A Study of the Adi Tribe of East Siang District," Department of Social Justice & Empowerment and Tribal Affairs, Government of Arunachal Pradesh, April 1, 2023.

²⁰ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), "Multilingual Education: A Bet to Preserve Indigenous Languages and Justice," August 9, 2022, www.unesco.org/en/articles/multilingual-education-bet-preserve-indigenous-languages-and-justice

knowledge of the speakers, which renders conservation necessary and imperative.²¹

Northeast India is an excellent example of an extremely vibrant linguistic area with more than 400 different languages in existence, grouped under several different language families such as Sino-Tibetan and Austroasiatic.²² The complex linguistic diversity of the area is a reflection of an enriched cultural background and social refinement where language assumes an essential role in the construction of community identity and cultural continuity. In this setting, the Tani language group stands out with its diverse dialects, including Apatani, Misi, Adi, Tagin, Lhoba, Galo, and Nyishi, each with distinctive characteristics and cultural significance.²³ Nevertheless, intergenerational transmission of these languages is on the decline, particularly among youth, who face pressure to shift to more dominant languages like Hindi and English in order to access education and employment. In recent years, the citizens of Northeast India have been increasingly voicing their fear about the spread of the Hindi language and Devanagari script in the region at the cost of the loss of their linguistic and cultural

²¹ D. Laitin, “Language Policy in India: An Unstable Equilibrium?” *Semantic Scholar*, October 7, 2024, <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Language-Policy-in-India%3A-An-Unstable-Equilibrium/cbefac8b25b111197f22a9660e4bd8da7fb7308c>.

²² Madhumita Barbora, and Mark Post, “Quest for a Scrip,” in *North East Indian Linguistics*, edited by Stephen Morey and Mark Post (New Delhi: Foundation Books, 2008), 255–270. Also see, Stephen Morey, and Mark W. Post, “Language Description and Language Endangerment” in *North East Indian Linguistics* Volume 5. Cambridge University Press, 2017.

²³ Mark Post, and Jackson Tianshin Sun, “Tani Languages,” in *The Sino-Tibetan Languages*, 2nd ed., edited by Graham Thurgood and Randy J. LaPolla (London: Routledge, 2017), 322–337.



identities.²⁴ This has, thus, become a contentious topic in the general language policy and cultural preservation agenda in the region.²⁵

Tani Youth Hold the Key

Considering these problems, the attitude of Tani youth towards language preservation and solidarity holds the key to determining the fate of their linguistic heritage. Talking to young speakers about their language not only empowers them but also gives them a sense of pride and ownership that can drive revitalization. Past studies have shown that successful language preservation programs are likely to entail the active involvement of young people, who can act as bridges between tradition and new need in society.²⁶ Their observations can, therefore, assist linguists in making decisions regarding the potential advantages and disadvantages of proposed measures, such as standardized scripts or dialect unification, which can increase accessibility and literacy without loss of cultural distinctiveness. In addition, the interconnectedness of language and ecological knowledge enhances the language conservation discourse. Interactions with Tani youth on how their language affects their ecology not only strengthen their identity, but also highlight the importance of integrating traditional knowledge into modern conservation practice.

This paper, thus, seeks to explore the Tani youths' voices on language preservation and unity, interpreting their opinions not only as

²⁴ Barbora and Post, "Quest for a Script." Also see, Asfahaan Mirza and David Sundaram, "A Crowd-sourced Knowledge Management Approach to Language Preservation and Revitalization: the Case of TE Reo MāORI," Pacific Asia Conference on Information Systems (2016).

²⁵ Mirza and Sundaram, "A Crowd-Sourced Knowledge Management Approach."

²⁶ Lego, R., and R. O'Malley. "Language Imposition in India: Nationalism or Prejudice." *Young Global Scientist Journal*, vol. 7, 2023, https://www.ygsjournal.com/_files/ugd/389a2b_3d75e05e29ec46dc9179ee48b954e657.pdf

statements of personal identity, but also as significant inputs to general language conservation programs. By paying close attention to the knowledge and values of the youth, we would be in a better position to recommend the adoption of efforts that lobby for the survival of the Tani language, and its conservation against contemporary threats.²⁷

Research Methods

This research study involved conducting interviews with young Tani people in Arunachal Pradesh (Papum Pare, East Siang, West Siang, Lower Subansiri) and Assam (Mising Autonomous Council) about language conservation, employing both grassroots and online research methods to collect a sufficient representative sample. It was facilitated through the use of Google Forms to design a survey questionnaire that was distributed through What's app, Facebook, and Instagram. The survey utilized a two-pronged approach in a bid to achieve the highest possible reach and randomness by aiming at digital media used by Tani youth.

The survey also involved schools, up to college level, in order to reach a younger segment of the audience which supplemented the data gathered. This approach helped in reconciliation of possible biases that can occur when a specific geographic location or subgroup is examined independently. Local leaders from various Tani villages/cities in (Dibrugarh, Jamin, Tarak, Yingkiong, Itanagar, Lakhimpur, Majuli, Jongchar, Kerker, etc.) were approached by volunteers in an attempt to involve them as well, thereby increasing the reach of the study.

For the purpose of involving the Mising community of Assam, the survey was conducted in the Assamese language, which is spoken by the majority. The responses of people above the age range of 25-34 years of

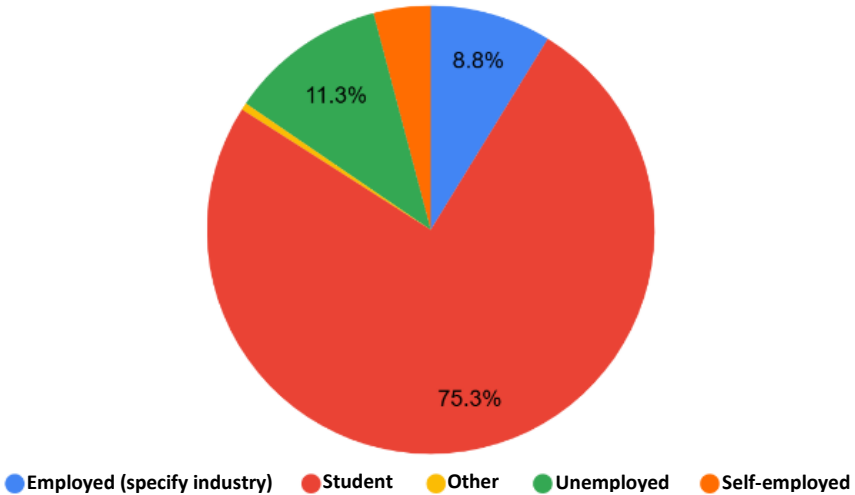
²⁷ Claudia Gafner-Rojas, "Indigenous Languages as Contributors to the Preservation of Biodiversity and their Presence in International Environmental Law," *Journal of International Wildlife Law & Policy* 23 (2020): 44 - 61.



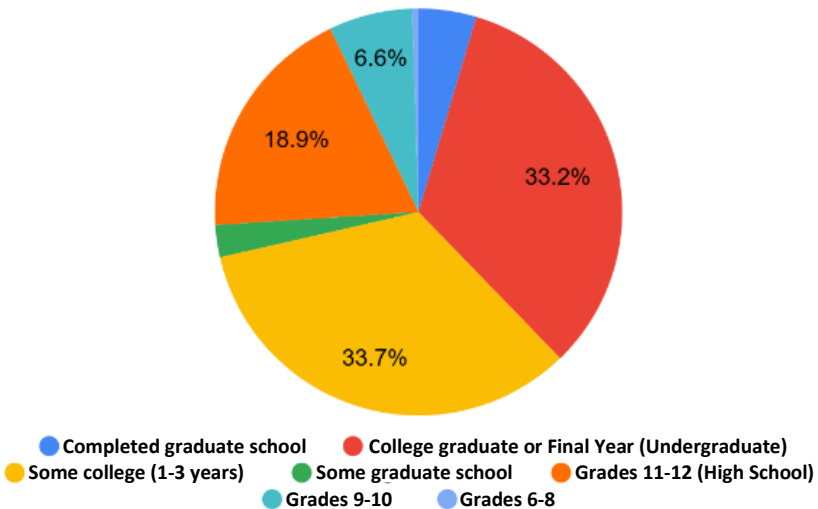
age were not accounted for in the survey because the focus was on capturing the perspectives of the younger generation, who are more likely to adopt and influence language evolution, and standardization efforts.

Results and Discussion

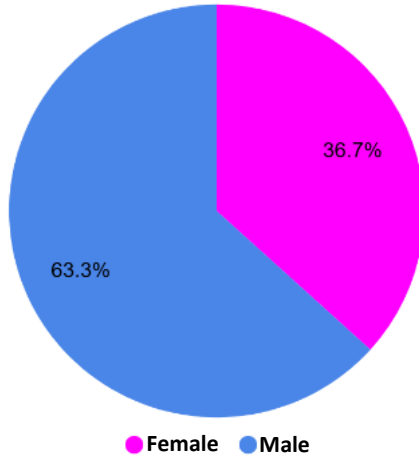
What is your Primary Occupation?



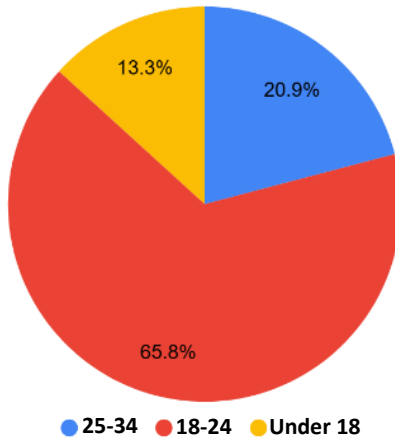
What is the highest level of education you have completed?



What is your gender?



What is your age?



What Tani Tribe are you?

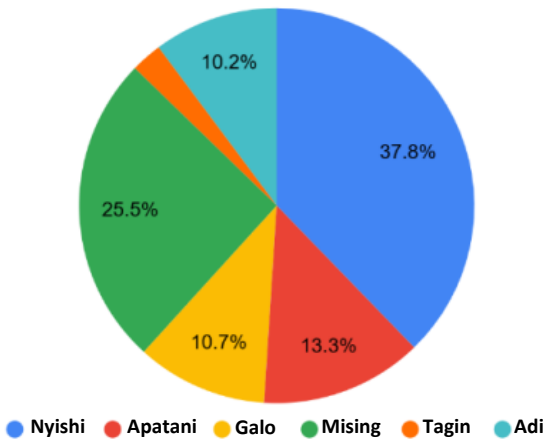
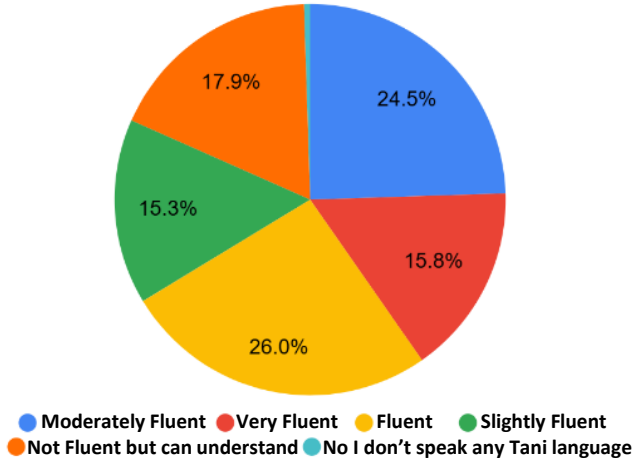


Figure 1: Demographics of participants in the survey.



A total of 197 people responded to the digital survey (Figure 1). When it comes to fluency in Tani languages, only under about a half (41.8 percent) claimed they were either fluent or very fluent, clearly showing the need for preservation efforts. However, 61.2 percent of those surveyed claimed they use the Tani language daily, possibly presenting an issue of volunteer bias—those that chose to respond may have been more likely to be familiar with the Tani language and culture, and consequently concerned with Tani matters (Figure 2). Nonetheless, 61.2 percent is a low figure when it comes to the propagation of a language.

Fluency in Any Tani Languages:



Frequency of Use of Tani Language:

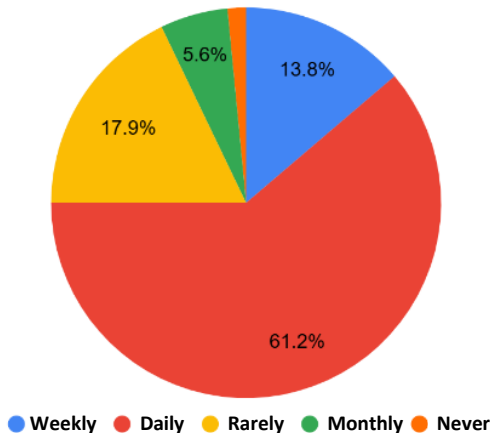


Figure 2: Fluency and Language use among Tani Youth

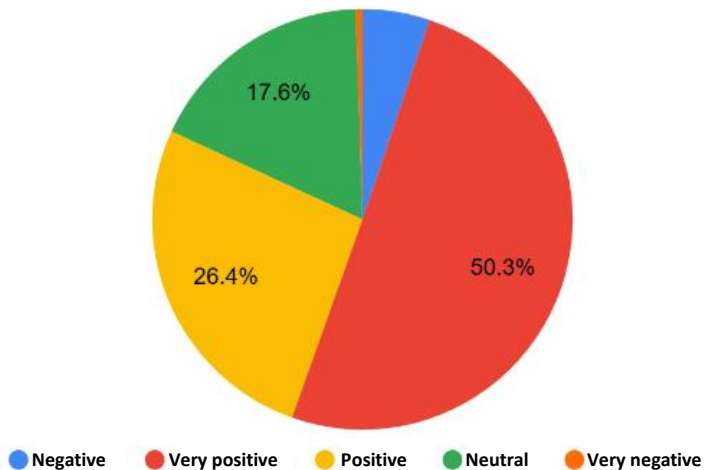
In terms of support for various Tani matters, the responses were unexpected because standard theories in language planning and sociolinguistics anticipate that resistance to unification will ensue. Generally, people who have closely related dialects or language varieties are strongly attached to the latter's local variants, which are the main markers of identity and heritage culture.²⁸ As many as 63.2 percent of respondents indicated “strongly supporting” the idea of a unified Tani language—a hypothetical, constructed language that would be developed by the Tani Foundation in order to bridge the gaps between the several Tani varieties. The postulated unified Tani language is an imagined auxiliary language to be employed among the different Tani-speaking tribes as a lingua franca in lieu of English or Hindi. Similarly, 61.7 percent of respondents showed support towards a “unified” writing system—the idea that Tani languages would be written in a unique constructed script as opposed to a modified Latin or Devanagari script. This is supported by the following questions, the first of which showed that 53.9 percent of respondents would prefer to write Tani using a unique writing system, and the second shows that 50.3 percent of respondents indicate a “very positive” opinion of Tani communities coming together, reinforcing the idea of unification (Figure 3). This suggests that the speakers of the Tani languages see a unified language as a way to cement their common identity, enable easier communication within groups, and possibly empower their communities socio-politically. This accords with certain language planning theories that hold the view that a community will embrace standardization if it perceives there are evident advantages in the areas of education,

²⁸ Proceedings of the Third International Conference on Social Science, Public Health and Education (SSPHE 2019), 2020, Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research (Xiamen, China, Atlantis Press), <https://doi.org/10.2991/assehr.k.200205.005>

governance, and cultural uniformity, even though such uniformity would theoretically imperil local diversity.²⁹

Such responses were unexpected since although a unified orthography would distinguish the Tani languages from others which could reinforce cultural unity, it may be difficult to push a new script onto people who are so used to writing in the Latin script, not to mention the complications with proposing new Unicode letters for electronic communication.³⁰ With these figures, we now have a clearer idea of what to do in terms of linguistic unification, but we plan to conduct further research on the reliability of these statistics.

What is your opinion on Tani communities coming under one umbrella, like the Nagas?



²⁹ Moshe Nahir, "Language Planning Goals: A Classification," *Language Problems and Language Planning* 8, no. 3 (January 1984): 294–327, <https://doi.org/10.1075/lplp.8.3.03nah>

³⁰ Barbora and Post, "Quest for a Script," 255–270.

What would you prefer to write Tani?

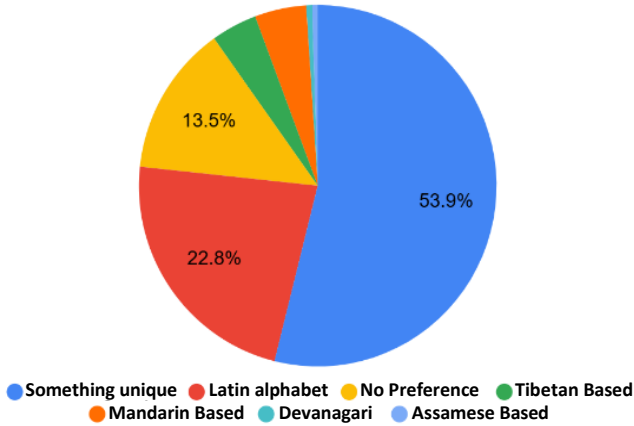
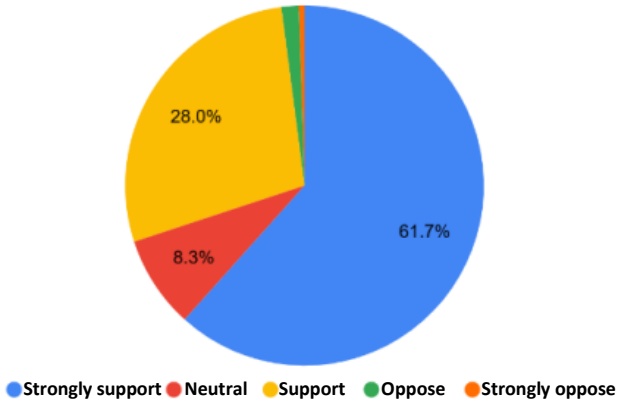


Figure 3: Perception on Unification of Tani Tribes of Northeastern India and Orthographic Preference

Support for Unified Writing System:



Support for Unified Tani Language:

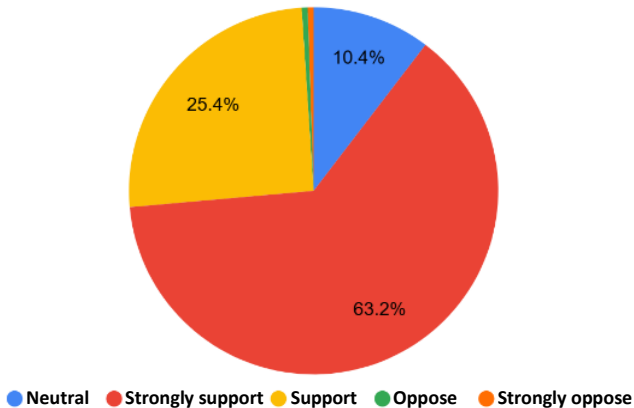
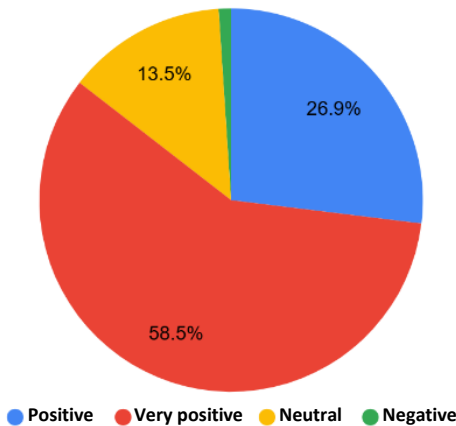


Figure 4: Perceptions among Tani Youth on Linguistic Unification

Returning to unification, 85.5 percent and 85.4 percent of respondents indicated either a “very positive” or “positive” response towards the impact of a unified language and writing system, respectively, on cultural preservation—the idea that having a unified language and writing system would contribute to cultural preservation (Figure 4, 5). From the answers, it can be seen that both unified projects are equally important when it comes to cultural preservation.

Impact of Unified Language Cultural Preservation:



Impact of Unified Writing System Cultural Preservation:

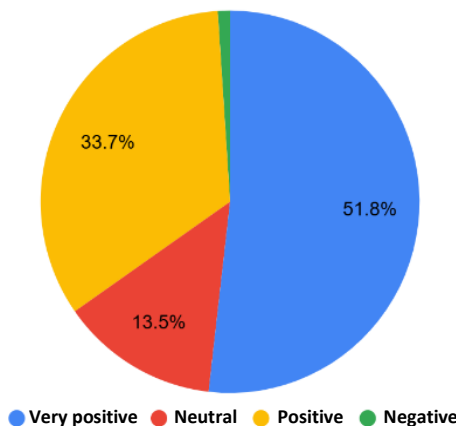


Figure 5: Perception on Potential Impact of Unified Orthography and Language on Cultural Preservation. No one chose “very negative,” and thus, it is not reflected in the legend.

Limitations of the Study

Since this research study specifically aims at Northeast India, the experience and desires of Tani people outside the region are not captured here. Another limitation of this work is that it mostly aims at the youth among the Tani population in Northeast India and possibly not the experience and desire of the Tani living outside the region. The study employed online questionnaires conducted via tools like Google Forms, WhatsApp, Facebook, and Instagram, which may have limited the sample to computer literates and Internet users. Although 192 people participated in the study, the generalizability of the sample is questionable since the sample may lack depth of opinions among the community. Another element is that tribe solidarity and retention of language are very socially, politically, and economically driven, and this was not something that was investigated in this study. Other studies could examine these matters at a deeper level so that an increased understanding of these matters can be obtained. It is also to be noted that the respondents in these surveys are people with access to the Internet, and can read and write. A more conclusive survey covering remote areas of Tani society and all age ranges is needed.

Conclusions

The results of this research study provide significant findings regarding the attitudes of Tani youth towards conservation and unification of language between tribes, and they have significant policy and research implications. The preference for both one standard Tani script and language, despite the practical difficulties that this entails, indicates that there is a motivation among the youth to conserve their linguistic and cultural heritage. The excitement generated by this issue suggests that future language revitalization may be aided by a process of creating a

standardized orthography or a constructed language, provided it is complemented by community-sponsored forums that deal with practical issues confronting real people, including literacy and the Internet.

In addition, Tani youth and culture are imprinted in the language, and offer a premise for future studies on the preservation of language as a mode of cultural unification. Future studies need to delve further into the socio-political settings of language policy across the region, and specifically how government-implemented policies, such as the promotion of Hindi, impact local language preservation. In the future, we intend to carry out a more detailed on-ground survey involving participants of different ages.

Acknowledgements

We would like to express our deepest gratitude to Priyom Kirti Hazarika for his invaluable assistance with translations in Assamese. Our heartfelt thanks to Takar Mili, Taba Domina, Pagbi Lombi, Nyayi Lombi, Migom Pamegam, Likha Nuka, and Tingom Godak for their crucial role in circulating the survey and gathering responses. We are especially grateful to Yulha Lahwa, who provided mentorship and thoughtful suggestions that enriched our work. We would also like to extend our sincere appreciation to Dr. Prem Phyak of Columbia University, for his guidance and insights during this research process. We would also like to immensely thank Dr. Anujeema Saikia, advisor of the Tani Language Foundation, for her constant guidance. Lastly, we would like to thank Hariprasad Doley, for helping us proofread this paper.

Notes on the Authors

Rimmo Loyi Lego (Luke Mìngkóng) is a junior, pre-medical student and biomedical engineering major with a biology minor at Stevens Institute of Technology in New Jersey, USA. His fields of study converge in the

areas of biomimetics, cardiology, biomechanics, synthetic biology, neuroscience, public health, and genetics (CRISPR). He is the founder of the Tani Language Foundation, an organization committed to the preservation and promotion of the Tani Languages. As a keen leaf collector, he maintains a personal herbarium of more than 250 plant species. Apart from his academic and ecological pursuits, Rimmo is also interested in reading, mountain biking, and badminton, and is an ardent supporter of Tottenham Hotspur F.C. He has also written articles on history, contemporary politics, and geopolitics.

Alessandro David is a first-year student at the University of Florida in Gainesville, Florida currently pursuing a BA in linguistics. At the Tani Language Foundation, he works as an analytical linguist on the backend, and as a writer. His previous experience in language preservation includes writing *Te Tīmata*—a free introductory grammar of Te Reo Māori, the indigenous language of New Zealand. In his free time, he enjoys language learning and making music.

Madhurjya Buragohain (苏心曙) is a Chinese (Mandarin) language student and aspiring linguist with a strong interest in Tai-Kadai and Dravidian languages. He is currently pursuing a Bachelor of Arts (Hons./Research) in Chinese at the English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad. Passionate about languages, he is proficient in English, Chinese, Thai, Hindi, Urdu, Tamil, Telugu, etc. He takes interest in Tai-Kadai, Dravidian, and Tibeto-Burman languages in particular. He has been actively involved in language research, co-authoring a paper in the *Journal of the Southeast Asian Linguistics Society* (JSEALS) and presenting at the 31st annual SEALS conference. He has also translated a Burmese book on Manipuri settlements in Myanmar into English and

authored a Manipuri script primer in Thai. He takes interest in reviving the Ahom language as a personal endeavor.

Dhruba (Takar) Mili is a student of history who is currently studying for a BA in History Honors at DHSK College, which is an affiliated college of Dibrugarh University. He is the Co-founder and Vice Executive of the Tani Language Foundation, where he works relentlessly for his mother language and culture promotion and preservation. Takar also engages in social and linguistic endeavors such as speech competitions and support for the Mising Linguistic Society (*Mising Agom Kebang* - MAK). Outside of class, he vlogs and experiences sharing with the broader community.

Hariprasad Doley is a final-year MA student of Linguistics at the Centre for Linguistics, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. His academic interests lie at the intersection of language, identity, history, and culture. Passionate about learning languages, he is especially drawn to how history, culture, and language continuously interact to shape human experience and expression.

Appendix: The Questionnaire

1. What Tani Tribe are you?*
- a. _____
2. What is your gender?*
- a. Male
- b. Female
- c. Other: _____
3. What is your age?*
- a. Under 18



- b. 18-24
 - c. 25-34
 - d. 35-44
 - e. 45-54
 - f. 55-64
 - g. 65+
4. What is the highest level of education you have completed?*
- a. No formal education
 - b. Grades 1-5
 - c. Grades 6-8
 - d. Grades 9-10
 - e. Grades 11-12 (High school)
 - f. Some college (1-3 years)
 - g. College graduate or Final Year (Undergraduate)
 - h. Some graduate school (did not complete/graduate certificate)
 - i. Completed graduate school
5. Primary occupation
- a. Student
 - b. Employed (specify industry)
 - c. Self-employed
 - d. Unemployed
 - e. Retired
 - f. Other
6. Name the Primary Language Spoken at Home (Language you use to communicate at your house)
- a. _____

7. Fluency in any Tani languages
 - a. Very fluent
 - b. Fluent
 - c. Moderately Fluent
 - d. Slightly Fluent
 - e. Not Fluent but can understand
 - f. No I don't speak any Tani language

8. What Script do you Use for Writing Tani on a regular basis
 - a. Tani (Latin based)
 - b. Assamese Script
 - c. Devanagari
 - d. Other: _____

9. Frequency of use of the Tani language
 - a. Daily
 - b. Weekly
 - c. Monthly
 - d. Rarely
 - e. Never

Unified Language and writing system

This section assesses your opinions on Tani unification

10. Support for Unified Tani language
 - a. Strongly support
 - b. Support
 - c. Neutral
 - d. Oppose
 - e. Strongly oppose

11. Support for unified writing system

- a. Strongly support
- b. Support
- c. Neutral
- d. Oppose
- e. Strongly oppose

12. What would you prefer to write Tani

- a. Latin alphabet
- b. Something unique to Tanis
- c. No Preference
- d. Mandarin based
- e. Tibetan Based
- f. Assamese Based
- g. Devanagari

13. What do you feel would be the Impact of Unified Language on Cultural Preservation

- a. Very positive
- b. Positive
- c. Neutral
- d. Negative
- e. Very negative

14. What do you feel would be the Impact of Unified Writing System on Cultural Preservation

- a. Very positive
- b. Positive
- c. Neutral



- d. Negative
- e. Very negative

15. What is your opinion on Tani communities coming under one umbrella, like the Nagas:

- a. Very positive
- b. Positive
- c. Neutral
- d. Negative
- e. Very negative