



# PRESERVING AND DOCUMENTING THE GALO LANGUAGE THROUGH INTERGENERATIONAL LANGUAGE LEARNING

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**Abstract:** Indigenous languages across Northeast India are increasingly facing challenges due to rapid socio-cultural change, educational mobility, and the growing dominance of lingua francas such as Hindi and English. The Galo language, spoken primarily in Arunachal Pradesh, represents an important cultural and linguistic heritage that is gradually experiencing reduced intergenerational transmission among younger speakers. This study examines the role of intergenerational language learning in preserving and documenting the Galo language. Adopting a qualitative approach, the study explores language use patterns within families and communities, the role of elders in language transmission, and the challenges faced by younger generations in maintaining linguistic continuity. The paper argues that intergenerational interaction remains one of the most effective mechanisms for sustaining indigenous languages, as it facilitates cultural transmission alongside linguistic learning. The study further highlights the importance of community participation, documentation initiatives, and educational support in strengthening language preservation efforts. The findings emphasize that language preservation is not merely a linguistic concern but a cultural and identity-based process that requires collaborative engagement between families, communities, and educational institutions.

**Index Terms - Galo Language; Language Preservation; Intergenerational Learning; Indigenous Languages; Language Documentation; Arunachal Pradesh; Language Shift.**

## 1. Introduction

Arunachal Pradesh is widely recognized as one of the most linguistically diverse regions of India, home to numerous indigenous communities, each possessing distinct languages and dialects. This diversity reflects a complex ethnolinguistic landscape shaped by geography, history, and cultural traditions. However, processes of modernization, formal education, migration, and increased integration with national and global communication systems have significantly influenced patterns of language use across the state. The growing dominance of Hindi and English in educational, administrative, and professional domains has gradually altered traditional linguistic practices among many tribal communities (Das, 2018; Boruah, 2020). Language functions not merely as a communicative system but as a repository of cultural memory, oral tradition, social organization, and ecological knowledge. Scholars emphasize that the decline of intergenerational transmission is one of the most critical indicators of language endangerment (UNESCO, 2015). When younger generations increasingly adopt dominant languages for educational and economic mobility, indigenous languages often experience functional restriction within home or ceremonial domains (Grenoble & Whaley, 2021). In Northeast India, language shift has been closely associated with changing aspirations, urbanization, and exposure to broader socio-economic networks (Sarmah, 2019).

Within this broader regional context, the Galo language presents a significant case for examining the relationship between intergenerational learning and language preservation. Although the language continues to function within community settings, observable generational differences in usage patterns suggest emerging pressures on linguistic continuity. This study therefore investigates how intergenerational language learning contributes to the preservation and documentation of the Galo language and analyzes the socio-cultural factors influencing its sustainability.

## 1.2 The Galo Tribe: Historical and Cultural Background

The Galo tribe is one of the major indigenous communities of Arunachal Pradesh and belongs to the larger Tani group of tribes inhabiting the central and western regions of the state. Linguistically, the Galo language is classified under the Tibeto-Burman branch of the Sino-Tibetan language family (Post & Burling, 2017). The tribe is primarily concentrated in districts such as West Siang, Leparada, Upper Subansiri, Lower Siang, and parts of East Siang. Traditionally, the Galo community has maintained a rich oral tradition encompassing folklore, myths of origin, ritual chants, and customary laws transmitted across generations.

Cultural identity among the Galo people is deeply intertwined with language, ritual practices, and traditional governance systems. Oral narratives, locally known ritual chants and community storytelling practices, play a central role in preserving collective memory and indigenous knowledge systems. Scholars have noted that among Tani tribes, language functions not only as a communicative medium but also as a carrier of cosmological beliefs and socio-political organization (Sarmah, 2019).

However, contemporary socio-economic transformations have influenced traditional patterns of linguistic transmission. Educational expansion, administrative integration, and increased mobility have gradually altered everyday language practices within the community. Recent research on indigenous communities of Arunachal Pradesh suggests that younger generations increasingly rely on Hindi and English in formal domains, leading to functional reduction of indigenous languages (Boruah, 2020). In this context, examining the Galo tribe's linguistic practices becomes essential for understanding broader processes of language maintenance and shift in the region.

### 1.3 Study Area

The present study is situated in selected Galo-dominated regions of Arunachal Pradesh, particularly in districts such as West Siang and Upper Subansiri, where the Galo language continues to be actively spoken within community and family environments. Arunachal Pradesh, located in the northeastern part of India, shares international borders with China, Bhutan, and Myanmar and is characterized by complex terrain and dispersed settlement patterns, which historically contributed to linguistic diversity.

The selected study areas include both rural and semi-urban settings to examine variations in language use across different socio-economic contexts. Rural villages generally demonstrate stronger intergenerational interaction and continued engagement with traditional practices. In contrast, semi-urban environments reflect greater influence of Hindi and English due to schooling, media exposure, and increased mobility. This spatial variation provides an appropriate context for analyzing how environmental and social factors influence intergenerational language transmission. By situating the research within these districts, the study seeks to explore how local socio-cultural conditions shape patterns of language use and how intergenerational interaction operates within evolving community structures.

### 1.4 Literature Review

Language preservation and documentation have become important areas of research in linguistics, anthropology, and cultural studies, particularly in regions characterized by high linguistic diversity. Scholars have observed that indigenous languages across the world are increasingly endangered due to globalization, modernization, and the dominance of major languages in education, administration, and media. Fishman (1991) emphasizes that the survival of minority languages largely depends on intergenerational transmission within families and communities. When younger generations cease to use a language in everyday communication, language shift gradually leads to language endangerment and eventual loss.

Research on language maintenance highlights the role of social domains in sustaining linguistic vitality. According to UNESCO (2003), language use within the home environment and community interaction remains a key indicator of language sustainability. Indigenous languages often decline when they are excluded from formal education and public communication, resulting in reduced prestige and limited functional use among younger speakers. In many multilingual societies, younger generations tend to adopt dominant languages for economic mobility and social integration, leading to a gradual weakening of indigenous linguistic practices. Studies focusing on Northeast India have similarly documented the challenges faced by indigenous languages in the context of educational expansion and increased mobility. Researchers have noted that the adoption of Hindi and English as *lingua francas* has facilitated inter-community communication but has also contributed to declining use of tribal languages among younger speakers. Language shift in such contexts is not merely linguistic but also socio-cultural, as language loss often results in the erosion of oral traditions, cultural knowledge, and community identity.

Intergenerational language learning has been identified as an effective strategy for language preservation because it enables the transmission of linguistic competence alongside cultural values and traditional knowledge. Grenoble and Whaley (2006) argue that community-based language practices, storytelling, and everyday interaction between elders and youth play a central role in sustaining endangered languages. Similarly, documentation efforts that involve community participation have been shown to strengthen linguistic awareness and encourage language revitalization. Recent studies on indigenous language preservation also emphasize the importance of integrating documentation with educational and community initiatives. Language preservation efforts are more effective when families, educational institutions, and community organizations collaborate to create spaces where indigenous languages remain relevant in contemporary life. In the context of the Galo language, existing research indicates a need for systematic documentation and increased emphasis on intergenerational learning practices to ensure linguistic continuity across generations.

The present study builds upon these scholarly discussions by examining the role of intergenerational language learning in preserving and documenting the Galo language within its socio-cultural context. By focusing on family and community interactions, the study contributes to ongoing research on indigenous language sustainability and highlights the importance of cultural continuity in language preservation efforts.

### 1.5 Research Gap

Existing scholarship on language endangerment and revitalization has extensively examined the structural causes of language shift, including globalization, educational policy, economic mobility, and dominance of majority languages (Fishman, 1991; UNESCO, 2015). Contemporary studies further emphasize that intergenerational transmission remains the most critical determinant of language vitality (Grenoble & Whaley, 2021). While these theoretical frameworks provide a strong foundation for understanding language sustainability at a global level, their application to specific indigenous communities often remains generalized rather than context-sensitive.

In the context of Northeast India, research has documented patterns of language shift and the growing influence of Hindi and English across tribal communities (Das, 2018; Sarmah, 2019). These studies highlight the sociolinguistic consequences of modernization and educational expansion; however, they frequently focus on macro-level language trends rather than micro-level family and community practices. Limited empirical attention has been given to how intergenerational language learning operates within everyday social interaction in specific tribal communities of Arunachal Pradesh. Furthermore, existing literature on Arunachal Pradesh often emphasizes linguistic classification, ethnographic description, or broad policy concerns (Post & Burling, 2017), with comparatively less emphasis on examining language transmission as a lived cultural process. While the vulnerability of several

indigenous languages in the region has been acknowledged (UNESCO, 2015), there remains insufficient research exploring how informal mechanisms such as storytelling, ritual participation, and household communication contribute to linguistic continuity.

Specifically, scholarly engagement with the Galo language has been relatively limited in contemporary research discourse. Although its classification within the Tibeto-Burman family is well established (Post & Burling, 2017), systematic analysis of generational language practices, attitudinal factors, and localized preservation strategies remains underexplored. There is a noticeable gap in empirical research focusing on how socio-economic transformation, urbanization, and digital communication intersect with intergenerational transmission within the Galo community. Moreover, many language revitalization studies prioritize institutional interventions such as curriculum inclusion or policy reforms, while comparatively fewer studies analyze the role of informal, culturally embedded learning processes within families. This creates a theoretical imbalance where structural solutions are emphasized without sufficient understanding of grassroots linguistic practices. The absence of localized qualitative inquiry into family-based language transmission in Arunachal Pradesh therefore limits the depth of regional scholarship.

The present study addresses these gaps by focusing specifically on intergenerational language learning within the Galo community. By examining household communication patterns, generational attitudes, and socio-cultural influences in selected districts of Arunachal Pradesh, the research contributes a localized and practice-oriented perspective to broader discussions of indigenous language sustainability. In doing so, it bridges global theoretical models of language vitality with community-level realities, thereby expanding the scope of scholarship on language preservation in Northeast India.

### 1.6 Objectives of the Study

In response to the identified gaps in existing scholarship—particularly the limited localized and practice-oriented analysis of intergenerational language transmission within the Galo community—the present study is guided by the following objectives:

1. To examine patterns of intergenerational language use within Galo-speaking households, with particular emphasis on everyday communication practices between elders and younger generations.
2. To analyze the socio-cultural and attitudinal factors influencing language preference among different age groups within the Galo community.
3. To investigate how modernization, educational mobility, urban exposure, and digital communication affect intergenerational transmission of the Galo language.
4. To explore the role of informal cultural practices—such as storytelling, ritual participation, and community gatherings—in sustaining linguistic continuity.
5. To propose context-sensitive strategies for preservation and documentation grounded in community realities.

### 1.6 Research Questions

Guided by the identified research gaps and stated objectives, the present study seeks to address the following research questions:

1. How is the Galo language transmitted across generations within household and community settings?
2. What socio-cultural and attitudinal factors influence language preference among elders, parents, and younger members of the Galo community?
3. In what ways do modernization, educational mobility, and digital communication impact intergenerational transmission of the Galo language?
4. How do informal cultural practices such as storytelling, ritual participation, and community interaction contribute to linguistic continuity?
5. What community-based and context-sensitive strategies can strengthen the preservation and documentation of the Galo language?

### 1.7 Methodology

The present study adopts a qualitative research approach to examine intergenerational language transmission within the Galo community. A qualitative framework is appropriate because the study seeks to explore lived experiences, language practices, and socio-cultural perceptions rather than measure linguistic competence quantitatively. The methodology is designed specifically to address the research questions concerning generational language use, socio-cultural influences, and preservation practices.

#### 1.7.1 Research Design

The study follows a descriptive-exploratory research design. It aims to investigate how the Galo language is transmitted across generations and how contemporary socio-economic factors influence linguistic continuity. The exploratory nature of the design allows for in-depth understanding of language practices embedded within family and community contexts. Qualitative inquiry is particularly suitable for indigenous language research because it captures social meaning, cultural nuance, and contextual complexity (Grenoble & Whaley, 2021).

#### 1.7.2 Participants

The research was conducted in selected Galo-dominated regions of West Siang and Upper Subansiri districts of Arunachal Pradesh. These areas were selected due to their significant Galo-speaking population and the coexistence of traditional and semi-urban socio-cultural environments.

Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure representation across generations. The sample included:

- Elder community members (aged 55 and above)
- Parents (aged 30–54)
- Youth and students (aged 15–29)

This generational categorization enabled comparative analysis of language use patterns and intergenerational transmission processes. Participants were chosen based on their active involvement in family and community interactions where language use occurs naturally.

### 1.7.3 Data Collection Methods

Data were collected using multiple qualitative techniques to ensure depth and contextual richness:

#### i. Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with participants from each generational group. Interviews with elders focused on traditional language practices, oral narratives, and perceptions of language change. Interviews with younger participants explored language preferences, attitudes, and everyday communication practices.

#### ii. Participant Observation

Observation of language use within households and community gatherings was conducted to understand natural communication patterns. Particular attention was given to storytelling sessions, ritual practices, and informal family interactions.

#### iii. Informal Conversations

Informal interactions were documented to capture spontaneous language usage and generational switching between Galo, Hindi, and English.

The combination of these methods ensured triangulation and enhanced the credibility of findings.

#### iv. Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis. Interview transcripts and observational notes were carefully reviewed to identify recurring themes related to:

- Intergenerational transmission patterns
- Language preference and shift
- Socio-cultural influences
- Attitudinal factors
- Preservation practices

Themes were organized according to the research questions to maintain analytical coherence. Thematic analysis allowed for interpretation of patterns within the socio-cultural context of the Galo community.

## 1.8 Ethical Considerations

Ethical principles were strictly observed throughout the research process. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study and provided voluntary consent prior to participation. Confidentiality of personal identities was maintained where requested. Cultural sensitivity was exercised while documenting traditional knowledge and oral narratives to ensure respectful engagement with community practices.

## 1.9 Limitations of the Study

While the present study provides valuable insights into intergenerational language transmission within the Galo community, certain limitations must be acknowledged. First, the study is based on a qualitative research design and a purposive sampling method within selected districts of Arunachal Pradesh. Although this approach allows for in-depth understanding of localized linguistic practices, the findings may not be generalized to all Galo-speaking regions or other tribal communities of the state. Linguistic practices may vary across villages and socio-economic contexts, which could influence patterns of transmission.

Again the study relies primarily on self-reported data obtained through interviews and informal conversations. Participants' responses may reflect subjective perceptions or socially desirable answers regarding language use and cultural identity. Although observational methods were employed to strengthen validity, the possibility of response bias cannot be entirely excluded. The research focuses predominantly on household and community-level transmission and does not incorporate quantitative linguistic proficiency assessments. As a result, the study emphasizes experiential and attitudinal dimensions of language use rather than measurable linguistic competence. The scope of the study does not extend to detailed linguistic documentation such as phonological, morphological, or syntactic analysis of the Galo language. Instead, it concentrates on socio-cultural processes of transmission and preservation. Future research may integrate linguistic documentation with sociolinguistic inquiry to provide a more comprehensive understanding.

Moreover, the rapidly evolving influence of digital communication and migration patterns suggests that language practices may continue to change over time. Since the study captures language use within a specific period, longitudinal research would be beneficial for examining long-term trends in intergenerational transmission.

Despite these limitations, the study contributes meaningful localized insight into the dynamics of language preservation within the Galo community and provides a foundation for future research in indigenous language sustainability in Arunachal Pradesh.

## 1.10 Findings

The findings of the study reveal distinct generational variations in language use patterns within the Galo community. Data collected from interviews and observations indicate that elder participants (55 years and above) consistently use the Galo language as their primary mode of communication in domestic and community settings. For this generation, the language remains deeply embedded in ritual practices, storytelling traditions, and social interaction.

In contrast, participants from the younger generation (15–29 years) demonstrate a noticeable shift toward Hindi and English, particularly in educational and peer-group contexts. While most young participants possess receptive competence in Galo, active use is often limited to communication with elders. This generational divergence reflects broader sociolinguistic patterns associated with educational mobility and exposure to dominant languages (Das, 2018). The study further reveals that intergenerational transmission remains strongest in households where elders maintain regular storytelling practices and encourage active language use. Ritual gatherings, festivals, and community meetings function as informal yet significant spaces for linguistic continuity. These findings support the argument that language sustainability depends heavily on continued use within family and community domains (Fishman, 1991).

Another significant finding relates to language attitudes. Younger participants who expressed strong identification with Galo cultural identity demonstrated greater motivation to maintain the language. This observation aligns with research emphasizing the relationship between linguistic pride and language vitality (Singh, 2008). However, in semi-urban settings, practical considerations such as academic success and career mobility often influence language preference, contributing to functional restriction of Galo in formal domains.

### 1.11 Challenges in Intergenerational Transmission

The study identifies several interconnected structural and socio-cultural challenges that affect the transmission of the Galo language across generations.

**i. Dominance of Hindi and English in Education:** Formal education in Arunachal Pradesh predominantly operates in Hindi and English, with limited institutional integration of indigenous languages. As younger generations increasingly associate academic achievement and socio-economic mobility with dominant languages, the use of the Galo language becomes largely confined to informal or domestic contexts (Boruah, 2020). This functional restriction weakens its role in formal communication domains and contributes to gradual language shift.

**ii. Urbanization and Migration:** Migration for higher education and employment reduces sustained interaction between elders and younger family members. Physical separation limits opportunities for natural language transmission through daily communication, storytelling, and cultural engagement. In semi-urban and urban settings, dominant languages often replace indigenous languages as primary mediums of interaction.

**iii. Changing Family Structures:** The transition from extended family systems to nuclear households has reduced regular exposure to elder speakers. Traditionally, elders played a central role in transmitting oral histories, ritual knowledge, and linguistic competence. Their diminished presence in everyday family life affects the continuity of intergenerational language learning.

**iv. Digital Communication and Media Influence:** Digital platforms, social media, and entertainment media predominantly operate in Hindi or English. Younger generations increasingly engage in digital communication using dominant languages, thereby reducing the everyday functional usage of Galo. The absence of adequate digital resources in the Galo language further accelerates this shift.

**v. Limited Institutional Documentation:** Although oral traditions remain culturally vibrant, systematic documentation of the Galo language in written, academic, or digital formats remains limited. The absence of standardized learning materials, structured archives, and formal preservation programs increases the risk of gradual linguistic erosion. Without supportive institutional frameworks, intergenerational transmission alone may not ensure long-term sustainability.

Collectively, these challenges indicate that while family-based transmission remains crucial, it requires reinforcement through broader structural and institutional support systems.

### 1.12 Recommendations for Language Preservation and Documentation

In response to the identified challenges, the study proposes the following context-sensitive strategies for strengthening the preservation and documentation of the Galo language:

- i. Strengthening Family-Based Language Use:** Encouraging consistent use of the Galo language within households can reinforce intergenerational continuity. Parents and elders should consciously promote active language use in daily communication, storytelling sessions, and cultural discussions. Intergenerational engagement within the family remains the most effective foundation for language sustainability.
- ii. Community-Led Cultural Programs:** Village-level language workshops, storytelling festivals, oral history documentation drives, and youth engagement programs can create collective spaces for language practice. Community participation not only strengthens linguistic competence but also reinforces cultural pride and identity.
- iii. Digital Documentation and Archiving:** Systematic recording of oral narratives, ritual chants, conversational speech, and traditional knowledge in audio-visual formats is essential for long-term preservation. Developing digital archives and online repositories can make linguistic resources accessible to younger generations who are actively engaged with digital media.
- iv. Educational Integration:** Incorporating the Galo language into school-level cultural studies modules, elective language courses, or community-based educational initiatives can enhance institutional recognition. Even limited curricular inclusion can significantly increase language prestige and encourage youth participation.
- v. Promoting Linguistic Identity Awareness:** Awareness programs highlighting the cultural, historical, and identity-based significance of the Galo language can strengthen positive language attitudes among younger generations. Reinforcing linguistic pride plays a crucial role in sustaining long-term intergenerational transmission.

### 1.13 Conclusion

The present study demonstrates that intergenerational language learning remains a central and foundational mechanism for sustaining the Galo language within its socio-cultural context. While elder speakers continue to maintain traditional linguistic practices through storytelling, ritual participation, and everyday communication, observable generational shifts influenced by formal education, urbanization, migration, and digital media exposure pose significant challenges to long-term linguistic continuity. These structural transformations have contributed to a gradual narrowing of functional domains for the Galo language, particularly among younger speakers.

The findings indicate that language preservation cannot depend solely on informal and natural transmission within families. Although household interaction remains critical, sustainable preservation requires a broader, collaborative framework integrating family engagement, community-led initiatives, systematic documentation, and educational inclusion. The study further highlights that language sustainability is deeply intertwined with cultural identity, collective memory, and social belonging. Therefore, effective preservation strategies must address not only structural factors but also attitudinal dimensions such as linguistic pride and identity awareness.

By offering localized empirical insight into intergenerational transmission within the Galo community, this research contributes to broader scholarly discussions on indigenous language vitality in Northeast India. The study reinforces the importance of culturally embedded preservation approaches that recognize language not merely as a communicative system but as a living repository of heritage, knowledge, and identity. In doing so, it provides a foundation for future research and policy initiatives aimed at strengthening indigenous language sustainability in Arunachal Pradesh.

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