DIALECTAL VARIATION BETWEEN UPPER AND LOWER ASSAMESE VARIETIES AND ITS SOCIOLINGUISTIC SIGNIFICANCE

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1. THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

1.1 Introduction

Any sociolinguistic enquiry into language is based on the assumption that we reveal ourselves through our speech. This assumption forms the basis of the present enquiry into variation in a language. The aim is to study what linguistic variation reveals about people of a particular speech community. In other words, the present enquiry is an exploration of the sociolinguistic significance of dialectal variation in the Assamese language. It is built on the premise that language and social psychology are linked to each other and that linguistic variations found in different regions can reflect the speaker's attitude towards the languages and their speakers.

It is set in the tradition of the variation studies of Labov, Gumperz and Milroy. The focus is on the question-how does the Assamese speaker react to dialectal variation ?

The answer to this question has been sought in the attitude of the speaker towards three things-the variety that the person speaks, the variety that the 'other' speaks, and the notion of a standard. All the three factors have been related to the speaker's verbal behaviour. This is done in the context of the concepts with the help of which the phenomenon of language variation has been studied. Language and dialect are two concepts which require defining for the purpose of the study. The attempt is to define them from the point of view of the speaker instead of imposing a given definition on the phenomenon being studied.

The scope of this study, then, is limited to the delineation of attitude. The study reveals that attitude cannot be dichotomised into binary opposites. At best it can be revealed by a continuum scale which will show how people react to dialectal variation . Attitude is a matter of degree. This attitude is related to the notion of acceptability of an utterance.

Concepts from social psychology are used to explain linguisic behaviour so that we may be able to relate it to its social context. This has also helped in providing an insight into the mind of the speaker-his prejudices and expectations in any interaction situation.

Language and dialect, as the study shows, can be used interchangeably. At times they are identified as one. The differences between them are highlighted when the need to maintain a separate identity arises. Otherwise, solidarity for the language overcomes these differences. What we identify as a language or a dialect depends to a large extent on the mind set at that time.

The study has been conceived in a simplified manner so that we can focus on certain issues that are relevant to the issue at hand- the sociolinguistic significance of dialectal variation. As with all variation studies, the present one also proceedes in a systematic manner, beginning with the definition of the relevant concepts so that they can be used to understand the social meaning that it will reveal as we proceed.

1.2 Theoretical orientation

1.2.1 Speech community :

In the most simplistic terms, we can define language as a systematic means of communication by using verbal signs to express thought, feeling and action. At the sociolinguistic level we focus on "who speaks what, to whom, where and why."(Fishman:1976). This study focuses on the variety and the reaction of members of a speech community towards variation in their language. We shall then proceed by discussing the concepts that are related to our study. Fishman (1976) has said that "a speech community is one, all of whose members share at least a single speech variety and the norms for its appropiate use". Hymes (1974), on the other hand, focuses more on the social aspect of a speech community than the acquisition or use of language. Thus he sees the *speech community as a social rather than a linguistic entity.* This approach makes it easier to relate language to its social context and see it as a living reality. The Assamese speech community can then be defined in terms of the single speech variety used or shared by its members while at the same time allowing for variations within the language as actually used in real life.

Language is seen as a means of interaction and this presupposes certain attitudes and premises about language by its users. As Howard Giles (1979) points out "It will be seen that a wide range of language variables such as accent, speech rate, pitch variety, voice loudness, interceptions, etc., can have important influences not only on people's general impressions of others, but also with regard to potential decisions they may make about them." What is important then, is to determine *how a message is said rather than what is said in terms of verbal context.* Listeners, therefore, use the perceived characteristics of speakers and speech style in

making multidimensional inferences of their likely backgrounds, personalities, psychological states, degree of influence over others, quality of their arguments etc. This is a complex process, depending not only on the listener's own social and personality charactistics but on the other's speech style, conformity and how other's speech behaviour in the situation provides cues as to how they perceive the speaker as well.

Giles points out the following aspects regarding the relationship between language and social behaviour which merit attention in this context. They are:

First, language is not a homogenous, static system but a multi-channelled, multi-variable one, and capable of vast modifications which afford social significance.

Second, a social or ethnic group's past, present and future are inextricably linked to language and hence it is often a salient dimension of their identity.

Third, people use speech behaviour as cues to group categorisations and subsequent inferences for evaluation in important social contexts.

Fourth, the specific manner in which a speaker encodes language behaviour can be a subtle, indirect yet crucial indicant of how he or she defines the situation and the other.

The above considerations shall play an important role in the present study which seeks to explore such phenomena in the context of the Assamese speech community and the variations within it. We shall thus proceed to discuss variation in a language in terms of language and dialect and thereby explain the sense in which these terms shall be used in the present study.

1.2.2 Variation :

Hudson (1980:24) defines a variety of a language as "a set of linguistic items with dissimilar distribution." Ferguson(1971:30) says that it is "Any body of human speech patterns which is sufficiently homogeneous to be analysed by available techniques of synchronic descriptions and which has a sufficiently large repertory of elements and their arrangements of processes with broad enough semantic scope to function in all normal contexts of communication."

As Wardaugh (1986) has pointed out, "what is particularly important in both these attempts at a definition is that variety is defined in terms of a specific set of linguistic items or human speech patterns which we can uniquely associate with some external factor (presumably a geographical area, or a social group). In the present context, the varieties in Assamese can be related to some external factor, which is in this case, a geographical area.

1.2.3 Language and dialect :

Haugen (1966) points out that the terms *language* and *dialect* are ambiguous. However, *language* can be used to refer either to a single linguistic norm or to a group of related norms, and *dialect* to refer to one of the norms, but the norms themselves are not static. It is difficult, therefore, to sharply distinguish between the two.

Consequently, a language can be taken as one of the various norms that are available to a speech community at a time, or that norm which has been taken as the standard. Dialect can then include all other norms which are also available at that time.

Grierson, whose extensive Linguistic Survey forms the basis of the categorisation of language variation, has compared dialects and languages to hills and mountains. While acknowledging the presence of so many dialects in India, he reiterated that it is difficult to draw a line joining languages and dialects.[1] Moreover, it is not possible to say at which point the hill (dialect) becomes a mountain (language).

But even though a continuum can be traced from dialect to language, there are phonetic, morphological and syntactic differences between them which are linguistically significant. Recent studies (1971 etc.) have shown that apparently homogenous societies like the Norweigian community reveal significant dialect variation over geographical area and across social classes.

Geographical distance does play a part in the forming of regional languages and dialects. But physical distance is only one of the various factors which contribute to linguistic variation. Other factors like the ethnic group to which the people belong, the languages spoken in that area, and the different varieties that people have control over, also play a role in this context. At a deeper level, the sense of regional identity among the people, their reference group (the group that they aspire to be a part of), the neighbouring people and the dynamics of their relationship are reflected in the making of a language or a dialect.

The term *dialect* is considered by many to be value laden since it assumes that a dialect is a language without a script. There is thus a heirarchical division between language variation which invariably places a dialect at

[1] Gumperz (1977): Some Remarks on Regional and Social Language Differences in India in *Language in Social Groups.*

the lowest level of the rung, with a more developed variety having a literary tradition being placed at the higher level as a language.

An objective study of this issue would have to remove the negative connotations associated with such terms. We can therefore use the term *variety* to deal with the language and dialect of a speech community so that no heirarchy is involved in the process. This will help us to focus on the regional variation in the language without imposing any notion of a standard or norm to be followed.

Defining such concepts can be problematic. Till as recently as 1957, Gumperz talks about the problem faced by researchers while collecting data on regional dialects. He says that the "educated public has paid little attention to the various forms of popular speech, and the average uneducated person, on the other hand, rarely has occasion to refer to his speech by name."As a result, names for many of the local forms of speech vary greatly.

Weinreich has also been quoted by various sociolinguists while highlighting the problems associated with defining language and dialect. R.Singh (1955) quotes Weinreich as follows " A language, Weinreich once said, is a dialect with an army, and that is about all there is to the distinction between language and dialect, for it is impossible to formally define or characterise the difference between a language and a dialect."

Angus McIntosh (1952) illustrates this problem when the community being studied is apparently homogenous but has dialectal variation. While referring to the situation in Scotland he states that "there may exist in any given community a complex linguistic situation...". At one end of

the scale he places the *broad* local dialect speaker who is least affected by influence from the outside world, and at the other end, a speaker whose speech has no percectible regional or dialectal characteristics at all. At the intermediate level he places the speakers who have more than one variety at their command. He also speaks of a network of dialects, each inevitably influencing the other.

Hill (1958), while talking about co-existent varieties, suggests a distinction between them. He calls some varieties *vernaculars* which are transmitted by parents to children and some *koines* which are trade languages and standard languages. Gumperz (1961) adopts this distinction and uses the term *argot* for all other styles of speech found in his study.

Gumperz also differentiates between a regional dialect and a regional language. According to him, in some parts of the country, such as the area around Delhi, the regional dialect is almost identical with the regional language. In such cases, the two may be said to be one and the same thing. In other cases, differences between the two persist. He insists, however, that no matter what the difference between regional dialect and regional language, the latter is the only vehicle for literature and serves as the speech of the educated people throughout the area.[2] We can see here that by saying that language is the only vehicle for literature and thereby precluding a dialect from this function sets up a kind of criterion on the basis of which languages and dialects can be identified.

This implies that there is a difference in the functional allocation between a language and a dialect. Following the above criterion we can say that a language has a literary history behind it while a dialect is a spoken

[2] ibid.

variety of the standard colloquial. This is the view, not only of many linguists, but of the laymen too. Since the present study has taken dialectal variation as the main area of focus, such a view assumes importance because it reveals what the member of the Assamese speech community identifies with, how he distinguishes between varieties and which variety he takes as the standard colloquial or the literary standard.

1.2.4 Standard:

A *standard* can be taken as an abstraction of the varieties spoken in an area which has been legitimised (through conscious or unconscious efforts) in speech and literature. According to Haugen (1966), certain steps must be followed if one variety of a language is to become the standard for that language. In addition to what he calls the " formal matters of codification and elaboration, the former referring to the development of such things as grammar and the dictionaries and the latter referring to the use of the standard in such areas as literature, the courts, education, administration and commerce", he says there are important matters to do with function. A norm must be selected by the community and it has to be accepted. If the community has great linguistic solidarity and is willing to overcome linguistic differences, this may not be difficult. If, on the other hand, it does not believe in linguistic solidarity, even the smallest of differences would not be easily overcome. The formation and acceptance of a standard , then will not be so easy.

1.3 *Issues*

This issue forms a part of the present study since it is a clear indicator of attitude towards a language. We can then deal with the following aspects regarding Standard Assamese:

(a) What is standard Assamese ?

(b) Which dialect or variety can be taken as the standard ?

(c) What are the factors which have contributed to the formation of the standard ?

The aim is to discover whether speakers of variety A or variety B identify with the standard or not. If they do, what prestige or status does it have for them? If they don't, then how do they react to the idea of a standard - do they accept it consciously or unconsciously as the norm to be folowed in formal speech, on special occasions and in writing?

We can now focus on the main issues in the present study which can be briefly described as follows:

(a) What is the speaker's attitude towards the variety of Assamese that he speaks ?

(b)How do members of the Assamese speech community react to regional variation or dialects in his language ?

(c) What does an Assamese speaker mean by a standard?

Preliminary investigations had revealed that the typical Assamese speaker is aware of the existence of regional or dialectal variation and that some social meaning is attached by the speaker to such variations. The attempt here is to identify the linguistic items which mark the differences in dialectal variation. From among these items, those linguistic items or variables which carry social meaning or are sociolinguistically significant can be shortlisted and tested on the subjects. For instance, what does the use of *apa* by a speaker of variety A and the use of *lora* by a speaker of variety B (to denote a 'boy') reveal about the respective speakers? In

other words, how does the listener categorise certain characteristics of another group on the basis of the use of *lora* or *apa*?

This study is set in the tradition of similar studies which have focussed on variations in laguages and their social meaning. A brief review of some relevant studies will show that the language of a people and their society are inextricably linked and vindicate Howard Gile's observation regarding speech behaviour and the related inferences.

1.4 Variation Studies

From William Labov's famous New York study of 1966, the Detroit study of Shey, Wolfram and Riley in 1968, to Milroy's Belfast study in 1980, the focus has been on social class and its reflection on linguistic behaviour. They have also highlighted the importance of social networks of communication. These studies have led some sociolinguists to believe that it may be possible to predict certain kinds of linguistic behaviour if we know the constraints that operate in connection with a particular variable and the relationship between that variable and factors such as social class, level of formality, age, sex and race.

Another kind of variation study looks at the *social meaning in linguistic structures*. A study in Norway in 1971 by Gumperz and Jan-Petter Blom looks at the notion of a standard and control over a language. The issue here was whether the speakers distinguished between the standard and the dialects. In other words, are they perceived as distinct or do they actually have linguistic distinctions? The conclusion was that the same term may indicate more local distinctions in one community and symbolize social stratification elsewhere. In this case, there was a strong

sense of loyalty to the local dialect with members of different strata or occupation which varied in degree.

When compared with the situation in India, it was found that the Indian system of caste implied class inequality and consequently a kind of dialectal variation which was identifiable with each strata or caste. The Norweigian situation however, was apparently homogenous and did not have an elaborate caste system. Yet, it did show significant dialectal variation. Thus, even in this apparently uniform group, there were clearly detectable dialectal differences. Moreover, as in the Indian situation, the norms governing interpersonal relations were the determining factors. This implied that there were grounds for postulating a new level of sociolinguistic analysis- the level of social communication.[3]

The same argument is followed by Lambert, Hodgson, Gardener and Fillenbaum (1960) in a study entitled Evaluational Reactions to Spoken Language. The purpose of this study was to determine the significance that spoken language has for listeners by analysing the evaluational reactions to English and French.

The basic assumption was that hearing the language is likely to arouse mainly generalized or stereotyped characterictics of the group. The methodology consisted of asking the subjects to evaluate passages which were read out by bilingual speakers in English and French. The conclusion was that French subjects not only evaluate English guises more favourably than French guises but that their evaluation of French guises are reliably less favourable than those of English subjects.

[3] Author's postcript.pp340-344.

Another study by Lambert, C. R. Saligman and G. R. Tucker in 1971 on The Effects of Speech Styles and other Attributes on Teachers' Attitudes Toward Pupils explored the influence of speech style in relation to other personal stimulus cues on the formation of teachers' expection of pupil behaviour.

In the above studies, then, spoken language has been found to exert a major influence on a listener's impression of a speaker's personality. In these studies, "speech appeared to act as a conspicuous indicator of a speaker's ethnic, cultural or social class group, and it apparently evoked those stereotypes which the listener felt were appropriate to the group so represented."

1.5 Stereotype

The present study is also concerned with the kind of stereotypes evoked by speech in a listener's mind. In the above sense, then, it follows Labov's (1972)distinction between three levels of features which he calls *indicator, marker* and *stereotype*.They serve as reference points for the categorisation of group characteristics based on speech behaviour. An indicator is a variable which is not perceived at a highly conscious level in the speech community , although it does serve to mark varieties of a language. For instance, caught can be pronounced as *kat* or *kɔt* depending on the variety of English that one speaks.

A marker is a variable which has taken on social valuation and is perceived at a conscious level. The basic assumption in using such markers is that behaviour can be distinguished as marked or unmarked

according to certain component features and that the unmarked is more neutral, more normal, or more expected.

A stereotype, for Labov, is the highest level of code marking. It is likely to be commented on, and is used in characterising groups when joking about them, but it need not conform to actual usage. One can assume then that "speakers have a concept of naturalness both for their language in general and language use in any specific context. Markedness, on the more general level identifies language forms as belonging to a particular variety, such as regional dialect, register, or social category." (Muriel Saville-Troike:1984:73).

Speakers can use code markers to distinguish among the varieties in their communicative repertoires. Code markers include not only social markers like occupation, but also physical markers like age, sex, and psychological markers personality characteristics and affective states. In this study, we shall try to identify the code markers which help in distinguishing the varieties.

1.6 Aim of the Study

We are now in a position to give a more focussed view on what the present study intends to explore. Two aspects regarding the social meaning of language variation can be analysed.

The first aspect is related to the kind of linguistic items that the speaker of Assamese identifies with a dialect or regional variety. It will try to answer the following questions regarding the speaker's response to dialectal variation:

1.What are the linguistic items that a member of the Assamese speech community identifies as markers of dialectal variation?

2.How is this related to standard Assamese?

3.What is the Assamese speaker's reaction to dialectal variation vis-a-vis the standard?

The second aspect is related to the sociolinguistic significance of the listener's reaction to dialectal variation. In other words, the aim is to find out how dialectal variation is taken as an indicator of the person's origin i.e. the place that he belongs to. It assumes that dialectal variation has some influence on a member of the community and sets out to discover the sociolinguistic information it can reveal regarding attitude towards language.

We can therefore, study dialectal variation in the Assamese language in the following manner:

Firstly, by identifying the linguistic items which indicate dialectal variation-whether at the phonetic, morphological, lexical or syntactic level.

Secondly, by eliciting responses from subjects to a questionnaire which includes these linguistic items.

Thirdly, by observing and interviewing subjects on the notion of a standard of the Assamese language.

1.7 Preliminary steps

1.7.1 1.Identifying a variety:

When we speak of dialectal variation, it is obvious that we take into account only those variations which are markers. In reality however, the varieties spoken in any speech community can never be mutually unintelligible. As Wardaugh (1986) points out, over large distances the dialects at each end of the continuum may well be mutually unintelligible with one or both ends, or with certain other intermediate ones. But there is a continuum of dialects sequentially arranged over space, like A, B, C, D, and so on. The question then is one of dileneating a dialect and identifying the dialect boundary.

As Wardaugh himself says, "Thus, when a language is recognised as being spoken in different varieties, the issue becomes one of deciding how many varieties and how to classify each variety". This will be the first step in the present study- to classify the dialectal varieties in Assamese.

1.7.2 The linguistic variable:

The second step is the identification of the linguistic items which are sociolinguistically significant and to locate the areas where they are used. These will be referred to as linguistic variables in the study.

1.7.3 The methodology:

The third step is to use a methodology which will allow us to elicit as much information as possible. In addition to the questionnaire and interviews with subjects, we have used the technique known as the Matched Guise Technique.

It involves the recording of different voices in different styles (both formal and informal) and playing them back to subjects who are asked to evaluate the voices in terms of certain features like personality traits, speed, quality and pronounciation.

The Matched Guise Technique reveals more private reactions to the contrasting group than direct attitude questionnaire. Lambert (1967) says that this technique is valuable as a measure of group biases in evaluative reactions. Inspite of certain drawbacks, this method has "good reliability in the sense that essentially the same profile of traits for a particular group appears when different samples of judges, drawn from a particular sub-population are used."

This method was used in a follow up study on French and English Canadians by Malcolm Preston in 1963 where eighteen personality traits are grouped into three distinct categories to study whether there will be systematic differences in reactions to French Canadian and Continental French speakers. The study by Lambert *et al* mentioned above enables one to classify the subject's responses in a systematic manner.

The present study has used a combination of the above technique with the questionnaire, interview and observation methods to elicit data. The main idea behind such a combination is to use the different methods to make up for the drawbacks of each other.

1.7.4 Analysis of data:

The fourth step is to analyse the data collected on the basis of which we can make certain statements regarding the subjects' attitude towards linguistic variation. This will be related to the broader context of attitude towards language and the speaker's group or community to which he belongs.

1.8 Locating the area of study: Assam and Assamese

With the above theoretical perspective, we shall now venture on the first step in the study, which is locating the area of study.

Assam is in the North-Eastern part of India and is surrounded by the neighbourinng states of Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Mizoram, Manipur, Tripura and Meghalaya. It is situated in the Brahmaputra valley with Assam occupying the Brahmaputra basin which extends from east to west along the river, and one part extending southwards into Cachar.

The original inhabitants of this place were tribals, but migration into the state has changed the configuration of the population. Non-tribals now occupy positions of power leading the tribals to wage a struggle for their own identity. The present population of the state has a majority of Hindus, followed by Muslims and a sizeable population of Christians. The state is divided into 23 districts and the capital which was at Shillong till 1971 was shifted to Guwahati after Meghalaya attained statehood.

Guwahati is on the south bank of the Brahmaputra towards Western Assam and it is the gateway to the north-east. A number of towns have

developed along the river bank which are a few hundred kilometers away from each other. Thus, if we start from the western most part of Assam i.e. from downstream and move eastwards i.e. upstream along the bank, we shall find towns from Dhubri, Goalpara, Hajo, Guwahati, Nagaon, Jorhat, Sibsagar and Tinsukia to Sadiya.

Assamese is the state language and is spoken all along the valley, though a variant of Assamese-Bengali is spoken in the far western areas in Goalpara district and in Dhubri which adjoins West Bengal and Bangladesh.

This language, which developed from Sanskrit at around the same time as Bengali and Oriya has been used since the sixth century A.D., according to certain historians. It developed its present form a few hundred years ago. Since it is surrounded by many tribal languages, a substantial number of words of non-Aryan origin have found their way into the language. For instance, words like *habi* 'jungle', *at'uwa* 'mosquito net' and *jilik* 'shine, tremble' which are of non-Sanskrit origin have become a part of the Assamese language and cannot be easily distinguished as loan words.

1.9 Dialectal Variation in Assamese

From ancient times, Assam was known as Kamrupa till the end of Koch rule in the seventeenth century. The area comprised the whole of North Bengal, Cooch Behar, Rangpur and Jalpaiguri.

The Indo-Aryan language of Assamese was first characterised in Western Assam, and in course of time, literature came to be produced in the

language of the region which had been designated as the Kamrupa language. Early Assamese literature was mainly written in this language. As centres of art, literature and culture were confined within Western Assam it encouraged the literature of that region. Writers and poets of the region flourished during this time and the language of Western Assam acquired a kind of prestige which continued till about the seventeenth century.

With the coming of the Ahoms from the eastern hilly regions and the setting up of their state in Eastern Assam, the centre shifted to Sibsagar which became the capital of the Ahom kingdom. The language of Western Assam gradually began to lose its importance. But literary activity in that region continued without a complete break from tradition.

When the American Baptist missionaries set up their establishment in Assam, they chose Eastern Assam and made Sibsagar their headquarter. Their printing press contributed to the birth of the first Assamese magazine or journal called Arunodoi, which came out in 1846. This was the first step in the establishment of a standard. Gradually, this came to be accepted as the literary standard of Assamese though many dialects flourished all over the state.

Assamese literature, in the strict sense of the term, came into existence in the thirteenth century. The earliest Assamese poets on record, Hema Aarasvati and Haribar Bipra enjoyed the patronage of the king of Kamatapura, who is said to have ruled in the later part of the thirteenth century. The dialects could have developed at around this time and attained their present form.

A break in the density of communication between regions could be one reason for the growth of dialects in Assam. There could be other reasons like the motivation to highlight regional or sub-regional identity, the influence of neighbouring languages and the natural tendency towards diversity which could have led to dialectal variation in the language.

Grierson acknowledges the presence of dialects in Assamese in his survey. He says :

"Over the upper part of the Assam valley the language is everywhere the same. As we go west, we find a distinct dialect which I will call Western Assamese, spoken by the people of Kamrup and eastern Goalpara." (I:394).

The reasons given for this dialectal variation is that Western Assamese was one political unit and did not have much contact with Eastern Assamese.

Emeneau also speaks of the presence of dialects in Assamese. The reasons he cites are that the political centre shifted to Sibsagar. Secondly, the American Baptist missionaries who came to Assam in the nineteenth century helped in promoting the Western Assamese or Sibsagar variety as the literary variety.

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There is a division, therefore, between Western Assamese variety and Eastern Assamese variety. Dr. Banikanta Kakati, in his doctoral thesis in 1935 had identified seven dialectal varieties of Assamese. They are enumerated below:

1. Standard Colloquial	(Sibsagar)	Eastern Assam
2. Patidarang	(Eastern Kamrup)	Western Assam
3. Dharmapur	(Northern Kamrup)	"

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[illegible]	(North Western Kamrup)	
5. Palasbari	(Southern Kamrup)	"
6. Barpeta	(Western Kamrup)	"
7. Satkosa	(Raj-Banshi)	Western Assam / Goalpara

The first division includes the Sibsagar variety till Nagaon district and Guwahati. From Guwahati downwards, there are as many as six varieties, each spoken in small adjacent areas. The two Western districts of Kamrup and Goalpara posses several local dialects which betray sharp points of difference with one another and with the standard colloquial of Eastern Assam.

Some linguists believe that the above division can be brought under two headings which can be called Kamrupi and Upper Assamese variety. In some cases, the dialects overlap in certain areas, especially in the bordering dialect areas where features of both the dialect varieties are found.

For the present study, however, it is not so much the dialectal variation between any two speakers that is important but the attitude of the two speakers towards each other. Our focus is not on what the differences are but on what they signify socially.

1.9.1 Upper Assam Variety and Lower Assam Variety:

We shall briefly discuss the points of difference between the Upper Assam Variety and the Lower Assam Variety, taking all the Western Assam dialects under the blanket term of Lower Assam Variety and the dialects upwards of Nagaon to Sadiya as the Upper Assam Variety. They shall henceforth be referred to as LAV and UAV, with "Upper" and

"Lower" being representative of upstream and downstream of the Brahmaputra. In this context, they do not have any heirarchical connotations. In fact, these terms represesnt the actual terms used by the layman in Assam while referring to places and the language in the state. For instance, Guwahati is in *namɔni ɑxɔm* 'Lower Assam' while Sibsagar is in *ujoni ɑxɔm* 'Upper Assam'.

In the following section we shall discuss certain dialectal variations between LAV and UAV.

a. Phonological: UAV is more nasalised than LAV. For example,

i. boyã̄ ami jaũ̄
come 1Ppl. go-fut.
Come, let us go.

b. Morphological:

i) UAV uses *-ti* suffix more frequently than LAV.

mahi-ti (maternal aunt)
dɑdai-ti (father's younger brother)
ai-ti (mother, used as address term for a young girl)

ii) The plural markers in UAV and LAV differ.
UAV has *-bur,- bilak, -hɔt*, as in

ii. kitap-bur pɛlai nidiba
book-pl. throw neg-give-2P-fut
Do not throw the books.

iii. xei bostu-bilak nɔstɔ hoi jabɔ
that thing-pl. spoil aux. go-fut.
Those things will get spoilt.

iv. xi-hɔt-ɔr taloi mɔi kailoi jam
3P-pl.-gen. loc. 1Psg tomorrow go-1P-fut.
I shall go to their place tomorrow.

This is contrasted with LAV as in-*gila, -gilak and -gilan*

v.kapur-gila dʰui pɛla
cloth-pl. wash throw-2P(-hon)
Wash those clothes.

iii) Certain words in LAV lose a vowel, as in

kʰɪmsi versus *kʰɪmɪsi*
LAV UAV

c. Lexical:

i) LAV has words like *kɛnɛ* which indicate perfectivity.

vi. mɔi bhat kʰai kɛnɛ jam
1Psg. rice eat perf. go-1Psg.fut.
I will eat rice and go.

UAV expresses the above in the following manner:

vii. mɔi bhat kʰai pɛlai jam
1Psg. rice eat throw(perf.) go-1Psg.fut.
I will eat rice and go.

ii) In UAV *akou* is used in a sentence to stress a statement and this word which means "again" loses its original lexical meaning.

viii. tɔi jabɔ nalage, xi goisɛ nɔhɔi akou
2Psg.(-hon) go neg-want, 3Pmas. go neg-aux again
You need not go since he has already gone.

iii) LAV uses the following words for the equivalent UAV or Standard Colloquial:

Kamrupia(LAV)	Standard Colloquial(UAV)	Gloss
pipra	*porua*	ant
ata	*kɔkadeuta*	grandfather
thouga	*dʰuniya*	beautiful
dima	*kɔni*	egg
soli/api	*suali*	girl

apa	*lora*	boy
tiri	*maiki manux*	woman
bapak	*deuta*	father
kɔrma	*mitir*	relatives
xoip^{h}ram	*mod^{h}uriam*	guava
bɔkra	*k^{h}ona*	stammerer
mohori	*nusori*	mosquito net
boini	*b^{h}ɔni*	sister

The above instances show that there are distinct variations between LAV and UAV which will strike any member of the Assamese speech community . It is obvious too, from the above that we have not included any instance of dialectal variation in Goalpara district. The reason for this omission is that the present study will be concentrating on the attitude of the Assamese speaker vis-a-vis UAV and LAV in general. The Rajbanshi dialect spoken in Cooch Behar and the Nalbaria dialect spoken in Nalbari have also been excluded for the same reason. The scope of the study is then limited to a general consideration of the two major divisions-UAV and LAV.

The above consideration has also limited the population of the study to two areas-that of Guwahati and Sibsagar. Both Guwahati and Sibsagar have been taken as representative locales of LAV and UAV respectively. Both the places have a political and historical tradition. Art and literature have flourished in the two towns at some point in history. Both are administrative headquarters and also attract migration from neighbouring areas.

Guwahati is a bigger city and more cosmopolitan than Sibsagar, but they have been taken as representatives on account of the language variety that is used in each.Their political history and the concentration of literary

activity in the two towns point to a commonality between them so that they can be compared in this context.

This is the background against which we have placed the present study. It may be limited in terms of the linguistic variables being studied and the number of informants interviewed for the purpose. The emphasis is more on the socio-psychological dimensions of speech behaviour than the linguistic data itself.

The linguistic data in this study shall be used as a kind of key with the help of which we shall explore the dynamics of interpersonal relationships in the Assamese speech community. The existence of dialects and the diversity of language is an accepted fact in any society. Linguistic enquiry into the nature of language cannot and does not ignore this truth. In fact, this study is based on the assumption that we cannot separate a language and its dialects. A dialect becomes a source of identification and association- man is known by the language he speaks. We shall try to identify the mechanism by which this identification is done. As the psychologist Robin Dunbar (1996) says, "Dialect acts as a badge". This study is an attempt to describe the social signifance of that badge.

2. METHODOLOGY

As stated in the previous chapter, the aim of this study is to discover the sociolinguistic significance of dialectal variation in Assamese. We propose to do this in the following manner :

a. selecting the linguistic variables which are sociolinguistically significant,
b. identifying the methods which will help in eliciting data, and
c. identifying the sample population from the area of study.

We may note here that our objective is to study attitude towards language variation which is horizontal variation across space. It is basically a qualitative study. But limiting it to a purely qualitative approach may not be enough to provide the necessary premise on the basis of which we could make generalized statements regarding attitude towards variation. Hence, the need for a quantitative approach to the problem as well. In particular, as Muriel Saville-Troike (1984:10) says, "the position is taken here that the qualitative and quantitative approaches to the study of culturally situated communication are not mutually exclusive, and that each can and should inform the other."

A review of the variation studies undertaken over the past twenty years have effectively demonstrated the relationship between the two approaches. In this study, then, we shall use both the approaches to elicit data from the chosen sample of the population.

2.1 The Variable

The first step is to identify the linguistic variables which are sociolinguistically significant. Dialects of a language may vary in a number of ways. There may be differences in lexical items, phonology, morphology and semantics between any two dialects. It is practically impossible to test a sample population for all the linguistic variations in a language. We have therefore, delimited our study to certain linguistic items which are sociolinguistically significant i.e. those which carry social meaning relevant to our attitude study.

These have been classified into three main categories - morphological, lexical and syntactic or sentential level. These items constitute the dependent variables which are significant in identifying Upper Assamese Variety (UAV) and Lower Assamese Variety (LAV).

At the morphological level we deal mostly with the addition of suffix *-ti* to kinship terms. This may be taken as an indicator of UAV. We have included this element in order to find out if UAV and LAV differ in the incidence of the use of this suffix. Generally, UAV is associated with forms like *aiti* 'dear girl', *kɔkaiti* 'elder brother', *dɔdaiti* 'uncle'. LAV, on the other hand, does not show this form so frequently.

At the lexical level, words of three kinds have been included. They are as follows:

a. Nominals like *anja* or *tɔrkari* for 'curry', *lora* or *api* for 'boy'.

b. Verbs like *nuwaru* or *nɔru* for 'I cannot', and *kʰuba di* or *kʰubɔ de* for 'give (to) eat'.

c. Plural markers like *-gila* in *kapur-gila* 'clothes' or *-gilak* in *manux-gilak* 'people'.

At the level of the sentence, a set of ordinary sentences have been included in the tests so that they form a representative of the total verbal repertoire of the Assamese speaker. Most of these sentences have occured in actual conversations and interviews and are therefore based in reality. Each of them may be one of the following three kinds:

a.UAV: i. xihɔt amar yaloi juwa kali ahisil
3Ppl. 1Ppl here go tomorrow come-pst.
They came to our house yesterday.

b. LAV: ii. xei api jonik matsun
that girl classifier-fem. call
Call that girl.

c. A grammatically acceptable construction which has both UAV and LAV:

iii. xei lora kɛtak suwasun (UAV), keŋke dauri gɛse (LAV).
that boy class.pl. look-2P how run go-pr.
Look at the way those boys are running.

The basic idea behind such a selection of linguistic items is that they may provide the necessary stimuli for a range of attitudes of the subject towards such encounters with dialectal variation. For instance, the subject's preference for *lora* or *api* may not only indicate which dialectal variety he/she belongs to but also whether he/she conforms to what may be called a standard form.

Similarly, his reaction to a sentence like b.ii. above will indicate his attitude to such forms. It may or may not be preferred depending on which part of Assam he belongs to. The reaction to the above will also reveal whether the subject considers it as a deviation or not. Hence the inclusion of such sentences in the tests.

Now that we have identified the linguistic items which are sociolinguistically significant, we shall consider the techniques used to collect data.

2.2 The Techniques

Four methods have been used in this study. They are:

1.Questionnaire

2.The Matched Guise Technique

3. Unstructured Interview

4. Observation and Recording

We shall describe each method in detail, explaining how the advantages of one make up for the shortcomings of the other.

2.2.1 The Questionnaire:

Wardaugh (1986) defines a questionnaire as a kind of data collection device designed to elicit data illustrative of the use of the variable or variables that are being investigated. According to him, a questionnaire must be able to elicit data in various circumstances, whether it is a casual situation, an interview situation or the reading aloud of lists of words and of minimal pairs of words like 'den' and 'then'. Labov (1970) has also identified five stylistic levels in his study of post-vocalic (r):

a. Casual speech

b. Careful speech

c. Reading

d. Word lists

e. Minimal pairs

Keeping in mind the objective of the questionnaire , we have concentrated on two main areas: word lists and minimal pairs. The minimal pairs included alternative items for the same object, like *raŋa* and *rɔŋa* for 'red' and *siri* and *seri* for 'stairs'.

We have used a closed questionnaire. The subjects were asked to choose one response from a given set of responses. Three kinds of responses to three kinds of questions were given, from which they had to select one. Thus, the subject had to indicate whether he/she

a.knew what a word meant (yes/no)

b.considered an utterance to be correct (incorrect/substandard/correct or allowed)

c.preferred one form to another (a/b)

Apart from the above responses, subjects were asked to provide the meanings of the words they claimed to have known. The responses to 'a' above were slightly modified in this context since they provided additional information. However the questionnaire was basically formatted in the closed form.

It has five sections which were marked A, B, C, D and E.

Section A

It contains questions regarding the personal profile of the subject.

Aim : To collect biographical information about the subject.

It includes questions relating to age, sex, place of birth and residence, time at present place, educational qualification, occupation, medium of education at school, college and university level and languages that are known to the subject. These are the independant variables in our study.

Section B

This contains 7 lexical items from LAV. They are words like *muidpʰɔl* 'papaya' and *xuipʰram* 'gauva'.

Aim : To test the subject's exposure to LAV.

Subjects were asked whether they have heard these words and what according to them was the meaning of these terms. Corresponding items from UAV were not included since they are common words for fruits, vegetables and birds which are used in everyday life.

Section C

It contains 21 sentences which represent one of the three types mentioned above:

1. LAV: iv. gar-ir *saka* pʰutil
car-poss. wheel burst-pst.
The wheel of the car has burst.

v. xi *gʰɔrɔk gɛsɛ*
2Psg. home go-3Psg-pst.
He has gone home.

2. UAV : vi. moi tak koisilu *akou* tak xudʰasun
1Psg. 3Psg-mas. tell-pst (again) 3Psg-mas. ask-2P
I have told him, ask him.

3. UAV and LAV : vii. xiyak loigɛsilu (LAV), kintu kamtu nohol (UAV).
3Psg-mas. take-go-pst. but work neg-aux-pst.
I took him with me but the work could not be done.

viii. xoru loratuk amoni nokoribi(UAV),xantit k^{h}aba di(LAV).
small boy-class. disturb neg-do(-hon),peace eat give
Do not disturb the small boy, let him eat in peace.

Subjects were required to classify the sentences as either (a) substandard, (b) incorrect or (c) correct/allowed according to their individual judgement.

Aim : To test the notion of standard in the mind of the subject-whether he/she was influenced by what is given to him/her through formal education or develops his/her own notion of a standard, irrespective of the dialectal variety that is used. In order to contrast the use of certain words, pairs of sentences like item nos.4-5, 9-10, 16-17, were given which differed only in one or two words.

Section D

This has 10 lexical items of everyday life and subjects were asked to indicate their preferences for any one of the two choices given to them. For instance, *dail* or *dali* for 'lentil', *raŋa* or *rɔŋa* for 'red', and so on.

Aim : To see how individual preferences were influenced by standard forms.

Section E

This contains kinship terms for brother, sister, aunt, uncle etc., so that the subjects could differentiate between one form and the other. Subjects were asked to indicate if the kinship terms that they used had *-ti* suffix in the common terms.

Aim : To test the addition of *-ti* suffix and to find out if this could be related to the identification of a dialectal variety.

We can therefore obtain the following information regarding the study in question:

a. The questionnaire provides us with some data on exposure to a variety other than one's own.
b. It helps in relating the subjects' notion of standard Assamese to his actual preferences.
c.It is instrumental in identifying certain traits of both UAV and LAV.

2.2.2 The Matched Guise Technique (MGT):

The basic assumption behind the MGT is that people are aware of certain variations in language which enable them to classify or categorise speakers into different classes or groups. For instance, a user of *apa* for 'boy' instead of *lora* would be identified with and classified as a speaker of LAV. Such variations may be noticed at a stylistic level or the quality of the voice or the speed of the speech would trigger off some reaction in the mind of the listener. The MGT seeks to discover the reaction of the listener to an unidentified voice or 'guise', on the basis of which he/she may form some categorical conclusions about the owner of that voice.

In the present study, the MGT involved the following steps:

Step1: Two speakers, one each of UAV and LAV were asked to read out two passages each in Assamese . The speakers were made familiar with the text before their guises were recorded so that there would be no mistakes. They were also asked to read an English passage. Finally, the Assamese passages taken from the newspaper were taken as the guises. This recorded speech formed the formal guise of the speakers.

After recording the formal speech, the speakers were interviewed in an informal question and answer session where they were asked questions regarding the nature of the language they speak and what they had done during the previous day. This was recorded and it formed the informal guise of the speakers.

Thus, we had four guises as the raw material for the MGT. They were marked as V1a,V1b, V2a and V2b where V1 and V2 represented guises of LAV and UAV respectively, and a and b represented the formal and informal styles of each guise.

Step 2:

Playing back the guises to the subjects.

The subjects were not provided with any information regarding the guises. The number of voices and the place of origin of the speakers were not disclosed to them. They were asked to listen to the recorded voices carefully and then respond to the questions asked. The range of options for the responses were given to them and they had to choose from among those responses.

These options were divided into the following:

a. Quality of the voice: not distinct, quite distinct, very distinct.

b. Speed: below normal, normal above normal.

c. Age

d. Place of origin of the speaker: Upper Assam or Lower Assam.

e. Level of education: school, college, university.

f. Similarity with the subject's way of speaking.

Subjects were required to indicate their responses on the basis of their individual perception of the voices that they had heard. The advantage of this technique was that it allowed the investigator the opportunity to elicit data on the subject's private reaction to a voice that he cannot identify otherwise. The only cue that he/she has is the voice and he/she makes some generalised conclusions based on his/her perception.

2.2.3 Unstructured Interview:

This method involved the technique of interviewing subjects about ordinary events or daily life.

Aim : To record data of informal speech of the subjects when they were paying the least attention to how they were talking.

Questions were asked on a variety of topics, of which the following were prominent:

i. Subject's responses to the political situation in the country.

ii. Daily life, interests and hobbies.

iii. Notion of standard Assamese.

iv. What they think about UAV and LAV.

2.2.4 Observation:

This involved the observation of the actual use of dialect varieties by the investigator.

Aim : To test the correlation between what the subjects claimed in the questionnaire and how they actually spoke.

An advantage in this study was that both the investigator and the subject belonged to the same speech community . This made it easier for any formal or informal conversation to be carried out. As such, significant data could be elicited and at the same time, one could observe the subject's attitude towards other interlocutors. This helped in identifying certain traits of both UAV and LAV. For instance, one could discern a kind of association between nasalisation and UAV in the mind of the LAV speaker. On the other hand, the UAV speaker associated LAV with harsh sounds. Both these associations were reflected in the subject's manner of interaction.

A combination of the four methods described above shows that data has been elicited regarding the following questions:

1. How do speakers react to dialectal variation ?
2. What is their notion of a standard?
3. How far are they influenced by this notion in everyday speech?
4. How do they actually speak?

2.3 *The Locale*

We shall now discuss the third aspect of our study, which is selecting the locale or area. As mentioned in the first chapter, though there are seven

main dialects in Assamese , we have put them under two blanket terms,UAV and LAV, which include the varieties spoken along the Brahmaputra valley. These terms are therefore abstractions for the variations which are used by speakers of Assamese .

In order to focus on the contrast between the two varieties, two urban areas have been selected which constituted the universe of our population. They are Guwahati and Sibsagar from where we shall draw our sample. We have already mentioned the factors which make them similar-centres of literary activity, immigration, administrative headquarters and political centres at one point of time. These make them adequate places for comparision.

2.3.1 Choosing the sample:

A cross section of the population was required to study attitude towards a phenomenon. In our study, then, we chose the sample in such a manner that it covered the following categories:

a. age b. sex c. education d. place of origin e. place of residence f. duration of stay at the present place and g. occupation.

Of the above, d. e. and f. are significant if the migration into both the places are taken into account. Thus, in Guwahati, which is in Lower Assam, people from neighbouring areas have migrated into it and settled here. Moreover a significant setion of the population includes people from Upper Assam as well who have brought their variety of Assamese into the city. The people in this city then, are exposed to both LAV and UAV.

In Sibsagar, immigration takes place from the neighbouring areas in Upper Assam. Migration from Lower Assam to this town is not

significant. Radio and Television does expose the local population to LAV but direct contact is limited.

Therefore, in order to compare the two areas , we have taken into account not only the parallels between them, but the differences too. This may limit our data to a certain extent but the advantages make a strong case for this selection.

2.3.2 Profile of the sample:

The total number of the subjects in the study is 40, out of which half are from Upper Assam while the other half are from Lower Assam. In each group of twenty, care has been taken so as to include an equal number of migrants from neighbouring areas and settlers for over three generations. Thus, we have the following

Table I: Sample of the poplutation.

	Upper Assam		Lower Assam		Total
Class	Male	Female	Male	Female	
Educated	13	7	10	8	38
Uneducated	-	-	2	-	2
Migrant	4	3	4	2	13
Nonmigrant	7	6	10	4	27

Of the categories mentioned above, age, sex and education are significant to our study. Our range of age, therefore is from 12 years to 80 years. The number of years at a certain place could also be a significant factor in influencing both language behaviour and language attitude. The findings

in the next chapter will indicate how significant this factor has been. Sex differences are not very significant for the study, though an attempt has been made to include an equal number of people from both the sexes. Occupation was assumed to be a significant factor in this study to a certain extent. Thus, we have included people from varied professions in the sample.

The profile of the sample is as follows:

Table II: Detailed profile of the sample

Class	Upper Assam			Lower Assam		
Occupation Age group(yrs)	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Retired 55-85	3	1	4	1	-	1
Professionals 25-55	3	2	5	4	2	6
Businessmen 25-55	3	1	4	4	1	5
Students 5-25	2	5	7	5	3	8
Total	11	9	20	14	6	20
Educated	13	7	20	10	8	18
Uneducated	-	-	-	2	-	2
Total	13	7	20	12	8	20
Migrant	4	3	7	4	2	6
Non-migrant	7	6	13	10	4	14
Total	11	9	20	14	6	20

2.4 Limitations of the methodolgy used

Despite efforts to use methods which would be "fail safe", limitations do occur in the collection of data. A few limitations in this study were related to the following aspects:

1. Choosing the sample
2. Eliciting responses to certain items
3. Recording data
4. Selecting items

2.4.1 Choosing the sample :

The difference in the configuration of the population of Guwahati and Sibsagar has limited our data to a certain extent. In addition to this, it was not possible to find an equal number representing one category in both the places. For example, interviews in Guwahati were taken during the busy shopping days on the eve of the state festival of Bihu . As such, businessmen were hardpressed for time and could not volunteer adequate information. Similarly, in Sibsagar too, festivities hampered access to the local population, especially youngsters and intellectuals who were participating in the festivities.

2.4.2 Eliciting responses to items :

In section C of the questionnaire , subjects were asked to categorise the given sentences as correct, incorrect, or substandard. Some could respond without hesitation while others wanted more options to choose from but ultimately had to choose from the three options given to them.

2.4.3 Recording data:

It is not possible to record data without disturbances from the surrounding area and this was a problem which could not be solved.The very nature of the

study demanded that the recordings be done in informal situations. The formal setting of a testing room could not have created the ambiance necessary for the study. Since the recordings were done at various places, the market place, a drawing room, a shop, a hostel room or an office, disturbances were inevitable.

The second problem was that of getting the subjects to speak in the language or style that they are most comfortable with. As Labov (1970) had remarked, no matter how informal the situation, the presence of a tape-recorder (or dictaphone) always makes the subject conscious of his speech to a certain extent and defeats the very purpose of the exercise. We can therefore say that this method was successful in a limited manner. For instance, the first subject who was interviewed wanted to practise what he was going to say to a particular question before he gave his recorded version. (It is another matter that his "practice version" was being recorded surreptitiously without making him aware of it).

It was not possible therefore, to use the above techniques optimally in this study. Restrictions were placed both on the investigator and the subject which were difficult to overcome. From the methodological point of view, the restrictions on the investigator has affected the collection of data to a large extent.

After the elementary steps of locating and contacting the subjects was done, the next step was to make sure that their responses were given after some deliberation and not in an off-hand manner. Moreover, there are no single style speakers, and one speaker may show a wide range of style shifting than others. In addition to this a subject may be equally conversant in both UAV and LAV and may not be able to choose between the options given.

In any systematic observation, the subject is aware that he is being observed. The dictaphone used in this study was an obvious kind of systematic observation which made him conscious. Even simple observation made the subject conscious to a certain extent if he feels that his speech is being monitored. Unsystematic observation helped in getting data on informal speech of the subjects and intra-group communication.

2.4.4 Selecting Items:

Another methodological problem was the selection of certain items which were to be included in the questionnaire . The basic criterion has been to select items which are significant to our study. This problem was encountered while drawing up the list of items in Section B of the questionnaire . These included words from LAV. The aim was to test the subjects' exposure to these words. Since the standard or UAV uses common words like *ɔmita* and *modʰiriam* for 'papaya' and 'guava' respectively, their use is widespread among all sections of the population. A speaker of LAV, then, may not have been exposed to such terms LAV terms at all. The reason why they were included was because the aim was to test the subjects' exposure to words other than the ones which were commonly being used.

A major limitation was the inability to test nasalisation in UAV which was perceived by speakers of LAV as a typical trait of UAV. Conversely, the pharyngeal sound of LAV words could also not be tested due to lack of adequate technical equipment. This is one of the reasons why the focus has been on the lexical and sentential differences between the two varieties. It was easier for the subject and the investigator to identify certain terms at the sentential level and then relate them to the question of attitude.

A combination of all the four methods, thus became imperative in the given circumstances. The basic idea was that one method would pick up data which the other had missed. It was with this objective in mind that the forty subjects in the sample were subjected to such a rigorous session for almost an hour each. The information that they have imparted both consciously and unconsciously have been collected with the utmost care by the investigator who is also bound by a personal perception of things-a limitation that cannot be helped.

3. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The data that has been collected using the methods described in the previous chapter will be systematically organised in this chapter. Our focus at this point, is on what the data say, not what they signify. The sociolinguistic significance of the study will be discussed in the following chapter.

In this chapter, we shall note the responses to each item and see if they fit into a pattern. We have divided it into six sections. The first five sections deal with the responses to the questions asked in the questionnaire and the interviews. So they deal with each method separately- questionnaire, Matched Guise Technique, unstructured interview and observation (systematic and unsystematic). In the sixth section, we summarise our findings and try to discern a pattern which may be relevant to our study.

3.1 Section 1

The Questionnaire : The biographical details of the subjects and the questions raised through this method.

We have already noted that the aim in the questionnaire was to test the exposure to LAV and the notion of a standard. The responses to such questions are dealt with in each subsection below.

3.1.1 Section A: Profile of the sample:

Upper Assam (Sibsagar): The age varied from sixteen years to seventy-five years. Most of the subjects were settled at Sibsagar while the rest (about 30%) were migrants from the neighbouring areas. Almost 95% of the subjects were educated. 55% were male while the rest were female.

Among the male, businessmen and professionals were the most in number, while students made up most of the female population in the sample. In fact, a large number of the population consisted of female members. Most of the subjects had received their formal education in Assamese and English with Assamese as the first language (L1) and English as the second language (L2). The subjects had also been exposed to Hindi which may not have been a part of their formal education. However, their mother tongue was Assamese, which meant that they used this language with a degree of fluency and native like competence and were therefore competent to be the subjects of our study.

Since we wanted to include a cross-section of the population, across age and class barriers, a number of people from different occupations were chosen. So, the sample from Sibsagar had professionals, businessmen, students, writers and research scholars, with most of the members of the sample in the age group of 15 to 50 years.

Lower Assam (Guwahati): The distribution of the migrant and the non-migrant population is similar to that of the sample of Upper Assam or Sibsagar with the percentage of the population being 70 and 30 respectively. However, while the migrants had settled down in Sibsagar for an average of seven years, they had been in Guwahati for more than twenty years. In other words, the migrant population in Guwahati had been there for a longer period of time compared to that of Sibsagar . The age of the sample covered a narrower range than that of Sibsagar with 12 years being the lowest age and 60 years being the highest. Most of the informants (70%) belonged to the age group of students (under 15) and 25 years to 55 years respectively. Almost 90% of the population was educated. Regarding the distribution of the sample by sex, almost 90%

was male, which is in marked contrast to the figure for Sibsagar. Interestingly, if we take the figures for education, we see that most of the students in the sample had completed their graduation while a large number of students in Sibsagar were in college. However, students make up a large section in the population both in Sibsagar and Guwahati.

Formal education was received in Assamese and English and the situation was the same as in Sibsagar. The cross-section of population also includes the same categories or classes like businessmen, professionals and students. The languages known to the sample are also similar to the ones in the Sibsagar sample. Therefore, the two samples differed only with respect to the distribution by sex and the number of years that they had been in Guwahati or Sibsagar. Otherwise they were similar in all other respects.

3.1.2 Section B: Exposure to LAV

Out of the seven items given in this section, only three were familiar to the first sample (Sibsagar). These were *painpipeli* 'a flower', *kurma* 'relative' and *tuilatɛŋa* 'a kind of lemon'. The rest were either being heard for the first time or were not used at all by anyone in that area. This is understandable since the sample consisted mainly of speakers of UAV.

As expected, speakers of LAV (second sample)could identify five out of the seven items. These were *painpipeli, kupti* 'a bird', *kurma, tuilatɛŋa* and *tʰuga* 'beautiful'. But it may be noted here that most of the subjects said that these words were used in the rural areas and not in the town they came from. Some of them even identified the dialect (Kamrupia) to which a few of these items belonged. The last item *tʰuga* 'beautiful' is commonly used in informal speech while the rest may not be used with the same frequency. A few of the subjects, on the other hand, were

familiar with these items but not very sure of what they meant. They did hazard a few guesses, some of which were widely off the mark.

3.1.3 Section C: Notion of Standard Assamese

Subjects were asked to classify a set of sentences (21) into three categories: substandard, incorrect, and correct or allowed. They were reminded that their responses should be based as far as possible, on what they perceived and not on what was given as a norm to them. The following are the responses to the sentences:

The UAV speaker (Sibsagar sample) invariably identified one sentence as correct. This was sentence no.6 :

i. xihɔt amar yaloi juwa kali ahisil
3Ppl 1Ppl-gen here go-pst. tomorrow come-pst
They came to our house yesterday.

This followed a standard pattern.

Opinion was varied with respect to the other twenty sentences. Items no. 1, 10, 15, and 20 were marked by most of the subjects as incorrect. Thus,

ii. mɔi bʰat kʰai kɛnɛ jam
1Psg. rice eat perf. go-fut
I will eat rice and go.

which is typical of the variety spoken in Guwahati is considered incorrect mainly due to the use of the word *kɛnɛ*. Similarly, the use of *gʰɔrɔk* in 15, instead of *gʰɔrɔloi* for 'to home' rendered it incorrect according to UAV speakers.

Item no. 20, however, is a combination of both UAV and LAV.

iii. xei lora kɛtak suwasun (UAV), keŋkɛ dauri gɛsɛ (LAV)
3Ppl. boy class.pl. see how run go-pr.
Look at the way those boys are running.

Even then UAV speakers have classified it as incorrect.

On the other hand, a few items which are not strictly speaking, of the UAV type, have been classified as substandard or correct by them. For instance, most of the subjects (60%) classified 2,5, and 9 as correct or allowed.

Thus forms like

iv. xei api jonik matsun
3Psg. girl class. call-2P.
Call that girl.

which is typically LAV, and

v. rajib bula lora jon bɛya nɔhɔi kintu
Rajiv named boy class. bad neg-aux but
The boy named Rajiv is not (really) bad.

which may belong to colloquial speech, are classified as correct or allowed by the UAV speakers.

Conversely, items 4, 13, and 18 are classified as substandard by at least half of the speakers. These sentences contain one word which is LAV while the rest of the words are UAV or standard colloquial. Therefore , these were taken as substandard, i.e., they could be used without being

rejected as completely incorrect. Thus, according to this response, one could use the form:

vi. basɔr tɔlɔt pori mɛkritu mara gɛl
bus under fall cat kill go-pst
The cat fell under the bus and died.

or

vii. xoru loratuk amoni nokoribi, xantit kʰaba di
small boy-class disturb neg-do peace eat give
Do not disturb the small boy, let him eat in peace.

even though they do not follow the norms of standard Assamese .

Opinion was divided on items 7,8,11,16, and 21, for an equal number of UAV speakers classified them as either substandard or correct, depending on their perception. For instance, sentences like

viii. moi tak koisilu akou, tak xudʰasun
1Psg. 3Psg.mas. tell again 3Psg.mas. ask-2P
I have told him, you ask him.

which are taken from colloquial UAV, can be either substandard or correct depending in the perception of the subject.

ix. garir saka pʰutil
car-gen. wheel burst-pst.
The wheel of the car has burst.

where *saka* which is LAV instead of *sɔka* which is standard colloquial is taken as substandard by one half of the sample, while the other half consider it correct or allowed.

This implies that there are no set criteria for determining what variety may be spoken and whether that variety is the correct variety or not.

Let us now discuss the responses of the LAV speakers to the set given in section C.

Most of the LAV speakers classified the sentences as correct or allowed. Some, however, suggested that the sentences were the standard colloquial which could be changed to the literary standard after minor alterations. For instance, the deletion of *akou* 'again' in 7 (viii. here) would make it a standard form and hence it can be classified as allowed. Some sentences like 8:

x. kihe, b^{h}ale asa ne?
what good be-2P or
Hello, how are you?

were also classified as correct or allowed even though some thought that it was used in the non-honorific sense. Sentence 6, as (I.) above shows, is standard UAV, is also calssified as correct by the LAV speakers.

Sentence 19, on the other hand, which has *nɔru* 'I cannot' (LAV) instead of *nuwaru* (UAV/standard), is also classified as correct by most LAV speakers. Most UAV speakers however, have classified it as substandard or incorrect.[1]

Sentences with *kɛnɛ* (ii. above) have evoked mixed responses from LAV speakers. Almost an equal number of them have classified it as either

[1] This will be discussed further in the following chapter.

substandard, incorrect or correct. If one response was that it can be a substandard colloquial variety, another response was that it was an unnecessary insertion and could be deleted without any change in the meaning of the sentence. Still another section had classified it as incorrect altogether.

Another interesting response was that to item no. 14.

xi. kapur-gila dʰui pɛla
cloth-pl. wash throw-2P(-hon)
Wash those clothes.

At least 20% of the sample has classified it as a substandard colloquial variety, 10% feel it is an incorrect expression, while 70% classify it as a correct form of the Kamrupia dialect. This classification of expressions as subdialects by the subjects has been seen only with the LAV speakers. Sentence no. 5 has also been classified as a form of the Barpetia dialect. This implies that compared to the UAV speakers, the LAV speakers are more aware of the variations within the language . This will be discussed later when we deal with the influence of exposure to different varieties on the mind of the subject.

3.1.4 Section D: Preference for certain terms of everyday use:

Ten pairs of words were given and subjects were required to indicate which form they used. For instance, they had to indicate whether they used *dali* instead of *dail* for lentil, or *raŋa* instead of *rɔŋa* for red. Each pair, then, contained two terms which were of UAV and LAV. The responses to this section were as follows;

Most UAV speakers indicated that they used the UAV form of item nos.1,3,7,8, and 9 i.e. they used *dail* 'lentil', *nemu* 'lemon', *tita* 'bitter', *kʰɔŋ* 'anger', and *rɔŋa* 'red'. Variations to such a unified response occured to no.2 *anja/tɔrkari* 'curry' and no.10 *bɔr/dɔra* 'groom'. A few of the subjects, however, could not choose between *kʰɔŋ* and *rag*, and *bɔr* and *dɔra* since both the forms were being used by them equally frequently. On the whole, then, the responses were similar in this section.

Compared to the UAV speakers, the LAV speakers showed considerable variation in their responses. The most consistent response indicating one form was given to no.3 *nemu/lebu*, no.7 *tita/titɛa* and no.8 *kʰɔŋ/rag*. Variations occured in 1. where speakers were equally divided between *dal* and *dali*. It was the same case with 2. *anja/tɔrkari* and 5. *magni/jurun* 'engagement'. In some cases, one form was preferred over the other, though both were used on several occasions. For instance, a few of the LAV speakers used *magni* more frequently than *jurun*, while some used a totally different form *aŋɔtʰi pindʰuwa* 'ring wearing ceremony' instead of the above two options.

3.1.5 Section E : Addition of suffix *-ti* to kinship terms:

This section had been included in the questionnaire so that we could find out if the differences in kinship terms indicated dialectal difference. The *-ti* suffix is usually associated with UAV. But there are some terms in both UAV and LAV which include this suffix. For instance, *bʰuiti* 'younger brother' and *bʰɔnti* 'younger sister' are universal all over Assam and denote an endearing primary relationship. For most of the UAV speakers, *-ti* is common to a certain extent. Forms like *dɔdaiti* 'elder brother, 'uncle' are not so common now though they are a part of the literary standard.

Even forms like *aiti* 'literally mother, used to address a young girl' is also used in UAV. - as *dou* in *baidou* 'elder sister', *mahidou* 'aunt' are honorific kinship terms which may be substituted for the above terms.

For some of the LAV speakers, however, use of kinship terms with *-ti* is taken as the literary standard and formal Assamese , though some forms are common in this variety too. This has taken on a community character with members of one community being identified with the use of kinship terms like *mamiti* 'aunt', *kʰuriti* 'aunt, *mahiti* 'aunt' etc. . It is difficult, therefore to identify speakers solely on the basis of kinship terms. It may be taken as a criterion only on some occasions with other factors.

3.2 Section 2

The Matched Guise Technique : How the subjects rated the unidentified voices on the basis of their perception of its qualities. What does the voice tell them about the speaker?

We shall first discuss the response according to the formal and informal voice specimens and then compare the results of the findings. V1 and V2 are the symbols used for the guises of LAV and UAV speakers respectively. Each speaker's voice has been recorded in formal and informal speech, (a) and (b) respectively. The subjects' responses are given below:

V1a.: The LAV speaker read out two passages A and B in Assamese . The duration of each passage was of two minutes each. This was the formal guise of V1.

Most of the UAV speakers found the voise to be quite indistnct. The speed was categorised as slower than normal speech, which was expected since it was formal prepared speech. Passage B was classified as more distinct than passage A. Some subjects (20%) found the voice to be of normal speed but the rest of the qualities were the same as identified by the other subjects in the sample.

65% of the UAV speakers could identify the voice as that of a LAV speaker on the basis of the pronounciation. The age of the person was put at anywhere between 35-50 years. (the actual age was 35 years). The voice was described as thick (harsh sounding, as one put it) and dissimilar to their own way of speaking. They could not say anything distinct about the level of education of the speaker.

The LAV speakers also found the voice indistinct. Some of them put the age at 30-35 years at one extreme while another group put it at 50-55 years at the other end. The speed was categorised as slow. Both the passages A and B were marked as being equally distinct or quite disticnt in some cases, and both were marked as being spoken by a person who is from the town of Barpeta (near Guwahati). A few of them said that passage B was slower than passage A. Regarding the education of the speaker, most of them agreed that the speaker had completed his bachelor's degree. Some of them found his pronounciation similar to theirs.

V1 b.: Informal speech of V1 where he gives his opinion about the Assamese language.

Though the speaker had used a number of LAV words like *koba* 'say', *nɔɾɯ* 'I cannot', *loba* 'take' in this speech, only a few UAV speakers could identify these words. They based their opinion more on the pronounciation than the use of different words, to classify it as LAV speech. The speed was classified as normal and quite indistinct by them.

The LAV speakers, on the other hand, found the voice to be quite indistinct and fast. Only a few found the speed to be slow. This was surprising, considering the fact that this speech would have come closest to the colloquial they use.

V2 a. :This is the formal speech of the UAV speaker who reads out two passages C and D in Assamese. Of these two passages, C is the same as A above, but D is different from B.

Most UAV speakers were quick to identify this as a UAV speaker. The speed was said to be slow and formal and the voice was said to be distinct. Passage D was said to be more distinct than passage C though both were read out by the same speaker V2. This led to some subject identifying passage D as that of a third speaker. However, both the passages were clear and found to be similar to their way of speaking. The age was put at 40-45 years. Some LAV speakers, however found V2 a. to be quite distinct or not distinct. But they were able to identify it as an UAV speaker's voice. Only one person identified it as LAV speech. The speed was said to be slower than normal for passage C and fast for passage D. A few subjects also identified D as a variety spoken in Central

Assam (at Nagaon). The age was put at 45-50 years. The actual age was however 30 years.

V2 b. : This is the informal speech of the UAV speaker where he talks about his day's work.

Some UAV speakers could identify this is UAV informal speech on the basis of the use of certain words like *pɛlai* (literally throw, but used in the sense of after). For instance, almost every sentence is interspersed with *pɛlai* by the speaker. (See sppendix II).

The speed was put at normal, though some said that it was fast. It was said to be distinct and easy to understand by nost of the UAV speakers. However, only half of them identified with it.

The LAV speakers also identified it as UAV informal speech, but most of them did not find it to be distinct. The speed was said to be too fast. A few of them could pick out *pɛlai* and *aru* 'and' in the UAV speaker's speech on the basis of which they were sure that this was UAV and not LAV.

A comparison of the two voices shows that the informal speech of the LAV speaker was definitely faster than that of the UAV speaker. Moreover, the UAV speaker is younger than the LAV speaker, but this may not be relavent to this study. It has been noticed, however, that the formal speech of the UAV speaker has been found to be more distinct than that of the LAV speaker even if they were reading the same passage A. The UAV speaker was put at a higher level of education , though this has not been done on the basis of any factual information.

This method has been helpful in testing whether a voice by itself can carry social meaning. The personal qualities of the speakers have been related to the voices on the basis of the assumption that an UAV or LAV voice may be expected to be different from each other.

3.3 Section 3

The Unstructured Interview: Catching the subject unaware

Most of the topics in the unstructured interview centered around the issues of language, the political situation in the country and some activities of the subjects. The issue of a standard was debated hotly by most subjects who betrayed their prejudices in the course of the interview. Some UAV speakers, for instance, were convinced that LAV cannot be the standard since it is not found in literary texts.[2] A few of the subjects were of the opinion that one can identify a person's place of origin on the basis of his/her speech. The use of *pɛlai* by the UAV speaker is an example cited in this context by the subjects.

Another view which was expressed by some UAV speakers was that one cannot change one's original accent. Two examples were cited by them to make their point. In the first instance, it was narrated how an educated doctor from Lower Assam "betrayed" his origins even after staying in Sibsagar for more than five years by using the word *kɛnɛ*. The other instance was the observation made by a few of the subjects that sentences 18, 20 and 21 were typical of what a domestic worker from Lower Assam would say after coming into contact with UAV. Some UAV speakers, however, were of the opinion that one could use LAV forms in the proper

[2] The making of standard Assamese and its relation to the subjects' notion of a norm are discussed in the following chapter.

context like in plays to delineate a character realistically. Another section of the sample believed that a standard form is necessary to preserve the language. A few of them also thought that the difference between UAV and LAV would disappear due to the mutual influence between the two.

Some of the LAV speakers also said that one can identify a speaker's place of origin through his/her speech, intonation or pitch. UAV speech, according to them is marked by a strong degree of nasalisation. This could not be tested quantitatively due to lack of adequate technical equipment. However, the question still remains whether we can actually associate a dialectal variety with a phenomenon such as nasalisation and how strong such an association will be. At least 45% of the sample interviewed in this study mentioned this phenomenon.

Some of them said that LAV is harsh sounding though they were speakers of that variety. LAV according to them, was *tʰɔŋra* or harsh. Opinion was also divided on the issue of a standard. Two main views have been found in the course of the interviews. One view was that a diglossic situation exists with LAV as the low variety and UAV as the high variety. This was an accepted fact by the subjects. Another view was that all the dialects were equally important but each had its own domain. Thus, one could argue for a multi dialectal situation without any hierarchy.

The necessity of a standard was accepted by many for its pragmatic use but not for the preservation of language. Moreover, as mentioned earlier, the LAV speakers were more aware of dialectal variation than the UAV speakers. This means that a LAV speaker was aware of the difference between Barpetia, Kamrupia and Nalbaria (all spoken in Lower Assam), while the UAV speaker was aware of only the difference between UAV

and LAV. Only a few of the UAV subjects showed awareness of the LAV and UAV dialects.

3.4 Section 4

Observing the subject: What does his/her use of certain words reveal about attitude to dialectal variation ?

Both systematic and unsystematic observation, through recordings and mental notes have shown that the average Assamese speaker does betray his origins when he/she speaks. For instance, a number of UAV speakers used *akou, aru, pɛlai* and *keni* 'where' in their informal speech. Most of them use these words unconsciously. Similarly the use of *mutse* 'than me', *koba nɔru* '(I) cannot say, *loba dise* 'has let me take', etc. are common forms found in the informal speech of LAV speakers.

The speech of both LAV and UAV speakers tended towards a slightly formal style during taped conversations which is a natural reaction to the situation. However, they did retain the key words which mark one off from the other. Some were also influenced by both the varieties and this was manifested in their speech. Among the different classes of the population, the elder members spoke a more pure version of their variety while the students or professional classes used a comparitively lesser pure version of their variety. On the other hand, the elder members could discern a change in the direction of influence of one variety over another which the younger generation was not aware of. No significant difference could be observed between the speech of male and female members of the sample. The migrant and non migrant members shared the same view regarding the difference between UAV and LAV. Duration of stay at a particular place did not affect speech style in any sociolinguistic manner.

3.5 Section 5

The notion of a standard : The findings so far have revealed that the Assamese speaker not only has the notion of a standard but also the notion of acceptability of an expression. Thus, an expression may be allowed or clessified as correct even if it does not follow the standard norm. This would explain the responses to certain items in the questionnaire . We can say, then, that two sets of criteria operate in classifying an expression- the formal and the pragmatic or acceptability criteria. This will be elaborated in the next chapter.

3.6 Summary of the findings

We can now make the following observations from the data:

i.There are more dialects in LAV than in UAV and speakers are aware of this fact.

ii.The UAV speakers are aware of dialectal variation but to a lesser extent than the LAV speakers.

iii. Both UAV and LAV speakers believe that a person can be identified on the basis of one's speech.

iv. Many LAV speakers are aware of the differences and the heirarchical relation between UAV and LAV but they accept the situation just like the UAV speakers.

v. Some UAV speakers believe that dialects are tribal languages and that there are no dialectal variations in UAV.

vi. Some speakers are aware of the differences in speech between two communities like the Ahoms, Muslims etc. .

vii. Mutual influence between the two varieties LAV and UAV leads to the appearance of a third variety which is a combination of both. Many speakers actually use this variety.

viii. The difference between UAV and LAV is easily detected in the use of certain words i.e. at the lexical level.

ix. LAV words are being introduced in plays and literary texts for creating an aura of realism.

Finally, one's attitude towards a fellow Assamese speaker, whether favourable or unfavourable, depends to a large extent on the variety that that person speaks. This may work at a conscious or subconscious level, as the analysis in the following chapter shows.

4. DATA ANALYSIS

The findings of the data reveals that dialectal variation in Assamese does evoke an attitudinal response in the minds of the speakers. This implies that we can arrive at some definite conclusions regarding the speakers' responses towards variation. The notion of attitude is related to a persons' reaction to a certain phenomenon, which in, this case, is dialectal variation. Our aim has been to adequately define this attitude in relation to the phenomenon in question.

4.1 Attitude

An attitude has been defined as "an interrelated set of propositions about an object or class of objects which are organised around cognitive, behavioural, and affective dimensions".(Ehrlich:1973:4).Social psychologist are of the opinion that an attitude represents a body of fundamental beliefs about the attitude object. These are analogous to the axioms and theorems of a formalized theory. An attitude, is then, defined by them as an individual's theory about an object. A person may have an attitude about an idea, an event, a situation, a physical object, himself, another person, or a category of persons. What we are interested in is the attitude about himself, another person or a category of persons vis-a-vis the language used. Our problem, then is two fold :

(a) defining the attitude
(b) the issue of the attitude object.

In this study, our concern is not simply the language that a person encounters in his daily interation with members of his community. It also

includes what that person thinks about the language that he encounters. Our attitude object is then the dialectal variation or UAV and LAV in the study. We have anlaysed the question of attitude at three levels:

i. The question of being aware of dialectal variation in Assamese .

ii. The notion of a standard as the norm in Assamese

iii. The notion of acceptability of variety in the mind of the Assamese speaker.

4.2 Awareness of dialectal variation

The first level is important since it allows us to find out how far dialectal variation is recongnised by the Assamese speakers. As the data show, the LAV speaker is more aware of dialectal variation around his area than the UAV speaker is of his. The actual linguistic situation does show that dialectal variation in Lower Assam (i.e. the area around Guwahati on both sides of the Brahmaputa) is marked, compared to the situation in Upper Assam (i.e. the area from Nagoan and Sibsagar upwards). Consequently, a LAV speaker may be able to distinguish between Kamrupia, Nalbaria and Sibsagar dialect more easily than the UAV speaker would be able to distinguish between dialects around his town. Moreover, it is an accepted fact that Kamrupia etc, are dialects of Assamese, which may not be the case with a dialect spoken near Sibsagar. The tendency in Upper Assam is to subsume all dialects and sub dialects under one blanket term UAV.

An interesting notion is this context is the view held by some UAV speakers that dialects are actually tribal languages. Assamese, as mentioned before, is the only Indo-Aryan language in North East India, and surrounded by Austro-Asiatic languages which are spoken in the

hilly areas. This could be a reason why dialects in the layman's term could mean tribal languages and not variation within his language.

On the other hand, there are UAV speakers who cann distinguish between the Ahom dialect of Assamese and the Sibsagar dialect of the language, on the basis of pronounciation of certain sounds and words. Some people also distinguish between the 'village' dialect of Sibsagar and the urban 'town' dialect, but this is a negligible number.

4.3 What is Standard Assamese ?

The question raised by every linguist who studies language in society is: "What constitutes the norm or the standard of the language ?" Paul Garvin's (1987) definition of a standard focuses on its ability to fulfill the complex communicative needs.

"One can define standard language as a codified variety of a language that serves the multiple and complex communicative needs of a speech community that either has achieved modernization or has the desire of achieving it. ... The most important characteristic of a standard language is its capacity of serving as a vehicle for the complex kinds of communication." (Garvin, quoted in Abbi:1996).

A standard, then, is at a higher level than any other language spoken in a particular area. Its function is inclusive of all kinds of communication and it is taken as a norm which has to be followed. Usually, government agencies, newspapers, radio and television contribute to the formalization of a standard in modern times. This formalization has taken place in the Assamese language too. We have already traced the emergence and standardisation of Assamese through the above process. (see chapter 1).

There is a standard colloquial and a literary style which is taken as the norm.

In this section, we shall trace the effects of such a standard on actual language use. We are dealing not with the normative aspect of language use but with the positive aspect of such use.

The history of the Assamese language tells us that the language had been formalised in the thirteenth century in Western Assam. This area is referred to in this study as Lower Assam. With the coming of the Ahom dynasty, Eastern Assam gained prominence. In the nineteenth centrury, the arrival of the American Baptist missionaries in Sibsagar saw the beginning of standard modern Assamese . This has been followed as the standard now for over a hundred years. It is natural, then, that every speaker of Assamese is trained (formally or informally) to adhere to certain rules of grammar and certain styles, irrespective of the region to which he belongs.

Interviews for the present study reveal that the issue of a standard raises questions regarding the acceptance or non-acceptance of the standard. The general tendency among the speakers was to accept the fact that Assamese does have a standard which is followed in speech and writing. There were a few, however, who did not recognize the Sibsagar dialect as the standard. According to them, the language spoken all over Assam is the same with some regional variation Differences exist only with respect to the pronounciation of certain words. On the other hand, a number of the LAV speakers were of the opinion that the variety they speak was not the standard and that one needs to adapt themselves to the standard in formal situations.

A heirarchy is evident here. UAV or the Sibsagar dialect is taken as the standard, which implies that it is capable of the "complex kinds of communication" required of it. Consequently LAV is the Lower variety which is restricted to non formal occasions. The implications of the acceptance of a standard are that it determines a person's verbal behaviour. This can happen in one of the following ways:

i. he may identify with the standard and try to adhere to it,

ii. he may not accept the standard and insist on his own variety,

iii. he may have his individual perception of a standard and judge verbal behaviour accordingly.

All the three possibilities have been noticed among the sample population . This means that though many speakers (of both UAV and LAV) are aware of a standard, they react to it differently. Obviously the UAV speaker identifies with standard Assamese and is proud of the association. The LAV speaker, on the other hand, either looks up to the standard or tries to maintain a balance between LAV and standard Assamese . This has interesting consequences for our study, as the later section on acceptability shows. It includes the notion of context of situation which affects a person's reaction to a speech act in a number of ways. The notion of acceptability has been discussed in detail in the following section. At this point, we shall be concentrating on the standard form in Assamese . As the data shows, one sentence in section C of the questionnaire has been marked as a standard form.. This is sentence no.6.

i. xihɔt amar yaloi juwa kali ahisil
3Ppl. 1Ppl. here go-pst. tomorrow come-pst
They came to our house yesterday.

The rest of the twenty sentences in this section have evoked varied responses from the forty subjects. From this we can infer that the speaker, irrespective of the variety that he/she belongs to recognises a standard form and accepts it as correct. On the other hand, the other sentences which do not fall into this category are allotted diferent categories- substandard of incorrect- based on the perception at that time.

Even when two sentences are contrasted, the choice is not always clear. For instance,

ii. basɔr tɔlɔt pori mɛkritu mara gɛl
bus-gen. under fall cat-class. kill go-pst
The cat fell under the bus and died.

and

iii. basr tɔlɔt pori mekuritu mɔra gol
bus-gen. under fall cat-class. kill go-pst.
The cat fell under the bus and died.

are contrasted in three words: *mɛkuri/mekuri, mara/mɔra,* and *gɛl/gol.* Here too, there was no unified response to these sentences, so that one could not classify them as the response to be expected of a LAV speaker or a UAV speaker.

A typical example of classifying sentences according to the dialectal variety that one speaks is sentence no. 18.

iv. xoru loratuk amoni nɔkɔribi, xantit kʰaba di
small boy-class. disturb neg-do peace eat give
Do not disturb the small boy, let him eat in peace.

A more or less consistent response from both sides has been found here. The UAV speaker who used *kʰɑbɔ* 'to eat' for third person instead of *kʰɑba* as given in the example above indicates the ungrammaticality of the sentence by marking it as substandard. The LAV speaker, on the other hand, puts it down as a correct version of what he speaks, thereby confirming his identification with such a variety. This can be taken as an instance of identifying with his/her notion of a standard while judging verbal behaviour.

The notion of standard, then, not only depends on grammar and literary tradition, but also on the individual's perception of the standard. This explains responses to the above sentences and others in the questionnaire. It also explains why some identify with a standard while others do not. Inherent in the concept of a standard is the idea of belonging or identification with something. In some cases, like Hindi, the standard is most often an abstraction or ideal type which is propagated through government, mass media and literature. In other cases, it is usually one of the many varieties which are available at a particular time, the variety which has been chosen as the standard. In the case of Assamese, it is usually the Upper Assam Variety or the Sibsagar dialect, which because of its historical importance got elevated to the status of a standard. In this context, it may be compared to the standardisation of the London variety of English as the Queen's English due to its political and historical prominence in the country's history. The Sibsagar dialect too had this advantage and what followed was a natural consequence of these events. Thus, with the coming of the missionaries who published the first written works (the Bible, poems etc.,) in this dialect, the standard was established permanently. After independence the same policy was followed because by then, UAV had settled down in its place as the standard Assamese .

4.4 Function of a standard

This cannot be seen in isolation as we are talking about the people who use this language . So it has to be related to how a standard unifies or differentiates a group. According to Ronald Macaulay (1994), languages and dialects have both a unifying function and a seperatist function. They help a group of people see what they have in common with each other and how they differ from 'others'. It is therefore, as important as the identification with a nation.

"It is a part of what it means to be English or American to speak in a certain way, just as it is a part of what it means to be Scots, Welsh, Texan or a New Yorker." (Macaulay:1994:66).

In the same way, it is a part of what it means to be a UAV speaker or a LAV speaker for the members of the Assamese speech community . There is a distinction, then, between 'us' and 'them'. This is reflected in two ways:

a. the speaker's identification with his group, and
b.his perception of the other.

Thus the UAV speaker will identify with the standard, which marks him off (to use Ginsberg's phrase) from the others while the LAV speaker sees the user of the UAV as the 'other'. The standard, then, not only unifies, but also seperates, and this in turn regulates verbal behaviour and reaction to such behaviour.

The standard also operates atanother level to construct the ideal typical sentence which is not only grammatically but also socially correct. There

is always an effort to maintain a standard (what in modern times is called 'quality control'). It is a conscious effort to impart a particular form to the younger generation, either through education or the mass media. (The results of such an effort have been discussed in a later section when we describe new trends in the language .)

According to John Earl Joseph, the common view is to put a high value on the notion of a standard language . He traces this striving for the perfect form to a deep-rooted sense that diversities are off-shoots of a perviously harmonious time when people shared a common tongue, and he calls it the "myth of a Golden Age". As he puts it:

" In so far as standardisation represents a cultural effort to restore language to its pristine state, its goal will be to overcome dialectal diversity by providing the ideal medium for communication among all members of the unit of loyalty." (quoted from Macaulay:1994:69).

Such a view found expression in a section of the subjects who were of the opinion that we need a standard in order to maintain the language .A standard in this case, implied the UAV or Sibsagar dialect. This was in sharp contrast to another section which advocated the use of certain LAV words like *kɛnɛ, gɛl* etc., in literature and plays to make the language more realistic. One can, therefore, discern a change in attitude among certain sections of the population , which views a dialect and a standard at an equal level and accords equal status to both. In their view, there is nothing sacrosanct about a standard, because any language is useful as long as it conveys meaning.

4.5 The notion of acceptability

What can be accepted or rejected in any speech act?
How is the verbal behaviour of one person acceptable and that of another unacceptable?
What are the criteria for accepting an utterance as correct?

These are the questions that have been raised in this section. The notion of acceptability is important for we are not simply looking at the grammaticality of an utterance. The responses to the questionnaire have already shown that what is acceptable may not necessarily be grammatical or the standard. The object, then, is to discover the criteria which makes a decision possible-whether they are subjective or objective criteria on the basis of which we judge a statement.

A distinction is usually made between acceptability, a concept denoting the reactions of native speakers, and grammaticality, denoting what linguists working within a particular theory find feasible. Grammaticality, as Lakoff (1977) points out, implies a binary decision on what should be included or excluded. Acceptability, on the other hand, does not require a binary distinction between the acceptable and the unacceptable: we can recognise a continuum from the most acceptable to the least acceptable. Furthermore, a given statement need not be inherently acceptable or unacceptable. Its acceptability may depend on sociological or psychological factors, such as the social status of the participants in the discourse and their relationship to the situation and the speaker's assumptions. (Lakoff, quoted in Greenbaum: 1977).

Grammaticality and acceptability, then, need not necessarily coincide. As the data show, certain sentences may not be grammatical but may be

acceptable under certain circumstances. Obviously, factors other than the purely linguistic one are at work here. This can be termed the extra-linguistic context. Thus, "although a sentence is judged by its appropriateness in its social, psychological and linguistic contexts, we may assume that some of these contexts outrank others in determining whether a sentence is acceptable." (Lakoff:1977). Lakoff also says that the notion of acceptability implies a standard against which a speech act may be judged. In talking about acceptability as opposed to grammaticality, the standard is grounded in the social and psychological context: a speech act is judged to be acceptable in a specific context. Thus, while both "How's ya?" and "How are you?" may be used in colloquial speech, the former will be acceptable only in a specific non formal context. In the same way,

v. kihɛ bʰalɛ asa ne?
what good is-2P or
Hello, how are you?

will be acceptable between friends, colleagues and peer groups but certainly not in the boss's office or between a client and an employee.

We shall now discuss a few responses to some sentences in the questionnaire . As mentioned before, a few of the sentences are a combination of both UAV and LAV. For instance, sentence no. 20:

vi. xei lorakɛtak suwasun, kɛŋkɛ dauri gɛsɛ
3Ppl. boy-pl look how run go
Look at the way those boys are running.

Most UAV speakers have classified it as correct or allowed, even though it is not purely UAV. On the other hand, sentence no, 21 below, which is

also a combination of UAV and LAV is rejected by most of them as incorrect.

vii. xiyak loi gɛsilu kintu kamtu nohol
3Psg-mas. take go-1Ppst. but work neg-aux.pst.
I took him with me but the work could not be done.

This is also like 20 above, in the sense that it is UAV and LAV but it has been rejected. On the basis of this response it is difficult to figure out the linguistic criteria which determine such judgements. The only plausible explanation is that each sentence is treated by the subject according to his notion of acceptability . Therefore what may be acceptable to X of UAV may not be acceptable to Y of LAV. The context and inclination of the subject becomes an important factor in this case.

Sometimes we may expect a particular response from one group, but the actual response may not coincide with the expected one. For instance, a particular sentence may be classified as correct by the LAV speakers if they associate it with their own. The UAV speakers may be expected to classify it as incorrect if it does not tally with the responses to other similar sentences. But the data show that it has been classified as substandard by them.

vii. bacʰatuwe taik kʰamsi dilɛ
child-class. 3Psg.fem grab-at give-pst.
The child grabbed at her.

This sentence, then, is correct for the LAV speakers but incorrect for the UAV speakers even though it differs with the standard colloquial only in one word (*kʰʉmsi/kʰʉmʉsi*).

On the other hand, another sentence which differs in one word too, has been classified as correct by the UAV speakers. Therefore, one cannot predict the response of a particular group of speakers .

Let us take another example which has the word kɛnɛ which is usually associated with LAV.

ix. mɔi bʰat kʰai kɛnɛ jam
1Psg. rice eat perf. go-1P-fut.
I will eat rice and go.

Though the tendency is to associate it with LAV, many LAV speakers did not agree as to its classification. In fact, many of them classified the above statement as incorrect or substandard. All the above responses indicate that acceptability judgements are based not only on group judgements but also on individual judgements. This would explain the deviation from the expected response and vindicate the view that an attitude is an individual's theory about something.

Responses to section C of the questionnaire show that some subjects deviated from the expected responsse. For instance, given a choice between *magni* and *jɪrɪn*, most of the subjects chose either one of the two, while a few said that they used both equally frequently. A small section, however, preferred a third option *aŋɔtʰi pindʰɪwa* 'ring ceremony' for engagement.

In another case, a subject said that she uses *likira* and *sia* for 'boy' and 'girl' respectively, instead of the usual *lora/apa* and *suwali/api* distinction. Therefore, even at the lexical level, one cannot predict the responses of the individual being tested.

One can, then, argue that instead of making a clear cut distinction between acceptability and unacceptability of a statement, a continuum scale would be a better representation of the actual picture. This is necessary for two reasons:

a. Verbal behaviour is actually judged as a matter of degree, and

b. A continuum scale would adequately represent such judgements so that we can show the acceptability judgement of the 21 statements which were tested on the forty subjects.

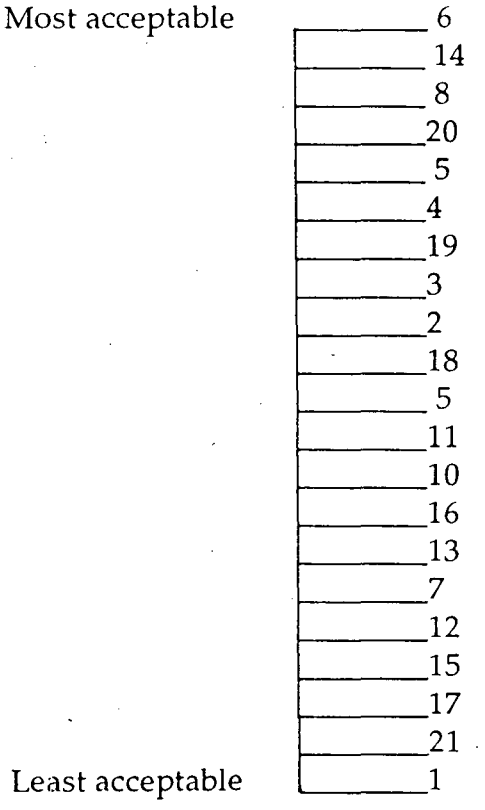

Figure I : Acceptability scale showing responses of the subjects to the sentences given in the questionnaire.

Acceptability , however, can only be ascertained by appealing to the intuition of the speakers and the above scale is built on the basis of such responses.

4.5.1 Identification with a group:

"The function of language as a means of group identification is important from the sociological point of view. He who speaks a language can be located socially as to the group or groups to which he belongs. By means of it, others can tell some of his characteristics, whether he is a friend or a foe, whether he is an 'in-group' or 'out-group' person." (Hertzler, quoted in Underwood:1988).

In this context, LePage's Theory of Acts of Identity becomes significant, for it systematizes the concept of identification with a certain group. This determines the linguistic behaviour of a person. Based on this hypothesis, Underwood (1988) claimed that a speaker's Texas accent bears a direct relationship to that person's identity as a Texan.

It is this assumption that has prompted the use of the Matched Guise Technique (MGT) in order to find out how a person identifies another on the basis of his speech. This reflects not only the identification with a group, but also the attitude of the person towards language variation . The data in the previous chapter show that of the four guises that were played back to the subjects, both UAV and LAV speakers could identify the formal speech of the UAV speaker as the most distinct. Consequently, they also classified him as the educated person in the middle age group. The LAV guise was classified as quite distinct or slightly distinct and also as educated, but not at a level higher than the UAV guise. This reveals a slightly favourable attitude towards V2 or the UAV guise, especially in informal speech. This attitude is based solely on the quality of the voice that the subject has been exposed to.

4.5.2 Exposure to variation determines attitude:

An explanation for this attitude can be found in the exposure of a person to different variations in speech. This implies that how a person perceives others depends to a large extent on what that person has been exposed to. Labov (1966) argues that "the social group of peers in which a speaker spends his pre-adolescent years is the main force in establishing his linguistic pattern." He attributes one's basic linguistic patterns to one's sex, ethnic group and parental background, while acknowledging that later in life one's speech is influenced by membership in groups based on education, occupation, and income. This is true of the speakers of Assamese as well.

Thus, the LAV speakers who have been exposed to the Kamrupia, Goalparia or Nalbaria dialects can identify certain varieties of language as sud-dialects, while the UAV speakers would classify them under one heading i.e. LAV. Then, as one proceeds higher in education, the exposure to the standard makes one aware of the variations between the positive and the normative aspects of speech. If he wishes to be identified with them, he modifies his speech accordingly, and if he wishes to retain a separate identity for himself, he will make a conscious effort to use the variety that he speaks more often. This leads him not only to group speakers according to what he perceives are their characteristics, but also classify them accordingly, at a higher or lower status.

This is reflected in the classification of sentences like 19, 20 and 21 by some subjects as 'servant's speech'. The sentences mentioned above are a combination of UAV and LAV and this very form prompted them to regard these sentences as a corrupt version of the standard or UAV. This was extended a step further to maintain the view that a speaker of LAV can never speak the UAV irrespective of the length of time that he

has been exposed to it. We have already mentioned the example cited by a UAV speaker where he mentions that an educated LAV speaker who has lived in Upper Assam 'betrays' his Lower Assam origins by his use of *kɛnɛ*. This becomes a source of ridicule for the UAV speaker. Here is an instance of a marked attitude towards a certain variety on the basis of the person's perception of what is acceptable or unacceptable.[1]

Identification with a group, however, is clearly different from membership of a group. For example, speaker A of UAV may identify with a group but may not be a member of that group. A better example would be the identification of a LAV speaker with the standard without atually being a member of that group. This aspect of identification has been elaborated by social psychologists who distinguish between the two. John Shelton Reed (1983) says that identification with a group implies that the group exists cognitively for them-so someone can identify with a group that he does not belong to, just as someone can fail to identify with a group that he does belong to but believes he cannot leave. Most importantly, then, identification is an 'emotional construct', which in simple terms is a feeling of closeness to members of that group. Therefore, if a UAV or a LAV speaker identifies with a certain group or speech style, he feels a closeness to members of that group, even though he may not be an actual member of that group. His verbal behavior will indicate his identification with a group.

[1] This is in the realm of what can be called 'prejudice'-a subject matter of social psychology.

4.6 Actual verbal behaviour

Does the speaker actually use the variety that he identifies with?

This question arises due to the gap between what is said and what is actually done. The identification with a speech variety may sometimes take place because of the high status accorded to that variety. Similarly, one may claim membership of a certain speech community if one hopes to gain by it. It is easy to adhere to certain standards in formal situations because one is conscious of it. The verbal behaviour of a person, as linguists have pointed out, depends on the attention that he pays to his speech. Thus, a casual speech style would not involve as much attention on the part of the speaker as a formal style would. This has been tested and proved on numerous occasions by linguists. And it has been proved in the context of the Assamese language too.

Unstructured interviews and unsystematic observation have shown that a speaker's use of words like *kɛnɛ, nɔɾu, kɔba* and *aru* increase in frequency in informal speech. This was an expected result since the speakers did not pay much attention to their speech. While most of the observations matched with the claims of the subjects, a few did not-and this may be explained by the natural gap between the claims and actual use of any speech style.

Attitude and behaviour may be incongruent sometimes due to three reasons:

a. the subject may not know how to act according to his attitude,

b. he may not have the opportunity to find himself in such a situation and hence act accordingly, and
c. he may not have the competence to act in the desired manner.

In informal speech, the subject was hardly aware of how he was speaking, since he was concentrating on putting across a point of view, or narrating an incident or expressing an emotion - situations when attention is drawn away from how something is said. This reveals more about the speaker than a formal question-answer session does. It was during such informal occasions that the following points have been noted regarding the subject's verbal behaviour:

a. The UAV speakers use a spoken variety which is closer to the standard than that of the LAV speakers.
b. The use of certain words like *aru* 'again' by UAV speakers, *pɛlai,* literally 'throw, indicating perfectivity', versus *kɛnɛ* 'perfectivity', *lagbɔ* 'need', *kɛŋkɛ* 'how' and *kimba* 'something' by LAV speakers show that these words are indicative of a particular variety. Moreover, the fact that they are used in informal speech and unconsciously by the speakers imply that these words are an integral part of the dialectal variety that they are identified with. Among the forty subjects in the sample, almost 95% exhibited the use of such words unconsciously.
c. Discrepancies between preference and actual language use is most notable in the case of words of everyday life. In section D of the questionnaire, subjects were asked to indicate their preferences for any one of the options given. These included words like *dail* or *dali* 'lentil', *raŋa* or *rɔŋa* 'red'and so forth. When the responses were compared with actual use, it was found that discrepancies occured in the following cases,i.e. *lebu/nemu* 'lemon' and *anja/tɔrkari* 'curry'. Obviously, the subjects

had claimed to use the perceived high UAV in their responses, while they actually used the LAV more frequently. This was found not only with the LAV speakers but also the UAV speakers, especially the younger generation which has not yet made a definite choice between the two or alternate easily between them. If their claim to use a particular variety is based on their notion of a high variety, then it confirms the diglossic situation in the speech community.

This is a manifestation of the attitude towards dialectal variation which places them on a hierarchical scale. Every dialect then, has a certain value associated with it - the standard dialect or UAV with the highest prestige and the LAV dialects with comparitively lower prestige. At the social-psychological level, this is explained by the concept of prejudice.

4.7 Prejudice: an attitude or preconceived notion

This concept has been defined in various ways by psychologists. Young and Mack (1962) defined it as "a culturally predetermined, biased attitude toward or conception of a person or group". According to Mc Donagh and Richards (1953), it defines "preconceived judgements towards persons, beliefs or objects." Therefore, a prejudiced person is viewed as having adopted a preconceived societal norm of disparagement and hostility towards selected others. In simple terms, prejudice can be defined as "an attitude toward any group of people". (Ehlrich:1973).

In the context of the present study, prejudice can be defined as an attitude towards a group of people using a particular dialectal variety. This attitude may be positive (favourable) or negative (unfavourable). The favourable attitude is usually reserved for the high variety or the

standard or the variety that one uses. However, one may be prejudiced against the variety that one uses if it is not accorded a high status by others. For instance, a LAV speaker may not be proud of being associated with LAV if he feels at a disadvantage due to his speech. A UAV speaker, on the other hand, may proudly claim to belong to UAV if he is aware that it will put him at an advantage over the LAV speaker. At another level, he will be prejudiced against LAV- an attitude which may have been ingrained in him either from childhood or due to his individual perception. According to Ehrlich, the environment around an individual provides the supporting mechanism for prejudices. Socialisation through parents, friends and adults and the mass media reinforce a particular viewpoint which he begins to believe in.

Stereotype

This leads him to create stereotypes in his mind. Stereotypes can be defined as "a set of beliefs or disbeliefs about any group or people." As a special language, stereotypes function to reinforce the beliefs and disbeliefs of its users. Ehrlich also says that it furnishes the basis for the development and maintenance of solidarity for the prejudiced.

This has happened in the Assamese speech community . Stereotypes of the typical UAV and LAV speaker are created in the minds of the speakers . A UAV speaker speaks in a nasalised manner, uses words like *akou* 'again', *pɔmiyai* 'pump air', *boya* 'let's go' and *pɛlai* 'after', which are his 'trademarks'. A LAV speaker speaks in a pharyngeal voice, a rough manner, uses words like *kɛnɛ* 'after', *api* 'girl', *tʰuga* 'beautiful' and *raŋa* 'red' which are his 'trademarks'.

However, this is simply the linguistic character of the speakers . Related to this are the social characteristics that one associates with UAV and LAV respectively. A UAV speaker is expected to be more 'cultured', 'sophisticated' and 'distinguished' in speech and behaviour. This is how he is perceived by the UAV speaker. The LAV speaker is expected to be 'uncultured', 'unsophisticated' and 'common' in behaviour. The example of the doctor from Lower Assam is a case in point. His use of *kɛnɛ* invites ridicule because it seems incongruous with his education. On the other hand, it reinforces the stereotyped idea that the UAV speaker has of the LAV speaker.

More than the linguistic characteristics, it is the social characteristics which determine the mode of interaction among members of the speech community . We have seen in this study how LAV is accorded a lower status by some UAV speakers because LAV is not associated with literature. In this case, literature is associated with culture and refinement. On the other hand, the LAV speaker ridicules the 'inflated ego' of the UAV speaker, who, according to him, lays claim to a higher position which is not justifiably his.

4.8 Belief and cognition in the speech community

We are dealing here with the question of belief. The speaker believes something about another speaker. This is determined by his experiences with and perception of other members of that variety. It also determines how he interacts with speakers of that variety. The most important factor in the belief statements is that they are based on and tested in the same society. Three fundamental principles of cognition characterise the relation between belief and objects:

1. Principle of distinction: Social objects are distinguished on the basis of the belief statements associated with them.
2. Principle of diffusion: Belief statements about social objects are widely diffused in society.
3. Principle of consensus: There is high consesus on the belief statements associated with specific social objects.

These three principles form the basis for the beliefs or attitude towards the phenomenon of dialectal variation in Assamese . The first principle explains how the stereotype has been formed. The typical LAV speaker and the typical UAV speaker are mental constructs which help in identifying a person on the basis of his speech. They may not necessarily exist in reality, but they form a type against which we may place others.

The second principle points to a common experience on the basis of which an individual may form his prejudices. It operates at the general level which determines the individual's behaviour towards others. The beliefs of one member of a speech community will be similar to that of another member of that community ,especially when the object is the 'other' speech community .

The third principle is the premise on which the attitude towards UAV and LAV is based. If there is a consensus on a certain attitude, it lends credence to that attitude and justifies that belief, according to the person who believes it. Thus, if more than 50% of a population believe that UAV is closer to standard Assamese, a UAV speaker feels justified in his belief.

4.9 UAV versus LAV: Past, present and future

So far we have seen how the making of a standard has led to diglossia in the Assamese speech community with UAV being the High variety and LAV being the Low variety. This has been reflected not only in the differential status of the two varieties, but also in the individual speaker's prejudices for and against the standard, UAV and LAV. The methods that have been used have shown that stereotypes regarding dialectal variation are common in this speech community . Interviews have revealed that such stereotypes determine the mode of interaction and the attitude between the speakers of the two varieties. Recent observations regarding interaction between UAV and LAV shows the following:

a. In the past the Sibsagar dialect was taken as the standard. It still maintains this position but a kind of reversal of direction of influence seems to have taken place. This seems to have happened over the last twenty years. LAV influences the speech of the younger generation in Upper Assam to a certain extent. For instance , a typical UAV sentence would be:

x. moi kailoi jam
1Psg. tomorrow go-fut
I will go tomorrow.

The younger generation of UAV speakers use a form which is closer to LAV or the variety spoken in Guwahati .

xi. moi ɔha kali jam
1Psg. coming tomorrow go-fut
I will go tomorrow.

Both the forms are grammatically correct and equally acceptable. The only difference is that x. is associated by some with UAV while xi. is not.

b.The emergence of Guwahati as a political, educational and cultural centre over the past fifty years is bound to have an influence on the linguistic behaviour of the people. This could happen due to the use of the Guwahati variety in television, radio and newspapers. Moreover, when a place becomes a centre of power, the tendency is to emulate the ways of that centre, language being one of them.

c. Though antagonism between UAV and LAV does exist at a certain level, it does not lead to a complete break in the links of communication. In fact, there a number of people who are of the opinion that the differences between UAV and LAV may disappear over the next fifty years. Though this may seem improbable at present, there are indications in the verbal behaviour of the speakers of both UAV and LAV which show that it can happen. Sentences which are a combination of UAV and LAV are becoming increasingly common in the verbal repertoire of youngsters and the second generation of migrants of UAV speakers who have settled in a place like Guwahati .

d. We can therefore, see two trends where colloquial Assamese is concerned:

i. UAV had influenced LAV, but LAV has also started influencing UAV, and

ii. The use of the Guwahati variety (which is not typically UAV or LAV) could lead to the establishment of a spoken standard (standard colloquial) which may smoothen out dialectal differences, at least where speech is concerned.

e. If attitude towards the phenomenon of language variation is significant, then, as Labov (1972) said, "it seems plausible to define a speech community as a group of speakers who share a set of social attitudes to language ." Therefore, agreement in subjective reactions would be a more important criterion than actual behaviour for sociolinguistic stratification. It not only allows for a subjective classification on the basis of which a speaker classifies another, but also provides an insight into the mechanism of attitude towards language . This is significant for our study.

The sociolinguistic significance of dialectal variation in Assamese, can then be measured in terms of the speaker's attitude towards dialectal variation and the linguistic features which trigger off such an attitude (whether favourable or unfavourable). At the level of speech, it is the difference in pronounciation of certain words and the use of certain words which distinguish UAV and LAV. At the level of the sentence, it is the acceptability or unacceptability of an utterance that requires attention. At the level of social interaction, it is the favourable or unfavourable attitude of the speaker which determines his reaction to the other.

What is of importance in our enquiry is the fact that dialectal variation is not simply a linguistic phenomenon. It has sociolinguistic significance as well This is manifested in speech, thought and action. How a UAV speaker reacts to a LAV speaker depends on his attitude and prejudices. It is also determined by the expectations that he has from any interaction situation. Usually the end result is a vindication of his beliefs, but sometimes it may be totally unexpected. For most of the time, however, language provides an adequate insight of the person who uses it.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Diversities in a language are usually attributed to regional differences, age, contact between people, breaks in the network of communication and grammatical rules. The focus in this study has been regional variation in a language. Since this is a sociolinguistic enquiry, there has not been any attempt to account for regional variation . It has limited its scope to the relation of language to its social context. In other words, regional variation in Assamese has been approached with the assumption that conveys social meaning. The present exercise was an attempt to discover that meaning.

Variation studies and dialectology have shown that people do make certain generalisations about the other group on the basis of the speech style or code that they use. Most of these generalisations are based on perceived differences between them. These differences may be a marker, or an indicator of a person and these help in creating a stereotype identified with a speech variety.

The basic question that this study sought to answer was: how significant is dialectal variation in Assamese ? The answers it has found conform to an expected pattern though there are significant changes in certain aspects. The study has also raised a few questions which call for a more detailed enquiry than the present one.

Keeping in mind the objectives of the study, a combination of the four methods were used- questionnaire, interviews, Matched Guise Technique and observation. Each method was meant to test certain aspects of dialectal variation . For instance, sections B, C, D and E of the

questionnaire were constructed to test the subjects' exposure to dialects, their notion of a standard, their preferences for certain ordinary words and their variety of kinship terms respectively. The Matched Guise Technique was designed to elicit responses to verbal behaviour based on the subjects' perception of the guises. And the remaining two methods were used to collect data on the subjects' actual verbal behaviour.

Physical and technical constraints in the field did not allow optimal use of the methods and this may have limited the data to a certain extent. More importantly, the inaccessibility of a large section of the population due to festivities and security reasons hampered work in the field. But the forty subjects who formed the sample of the population fulfilled the basic criteria required for the study. They were native speakers of Assamese and came from diverse backgrounds. Their responses therefore, were taken as authentic and as an adequate representation of the speech community to which they belong.

The data revealed that though certain parameters were used, some of them did not affect the results significantly. Sex difference did not affect reactions to dialectal variation at all. Neither did occupational differences. Age, however, was significant because the younger generation did show a slight variation in verbal behaviour. The new trend mentioned in the preceeding chapter which showed the influence of the Lower Assam dialect on youngsters of Sibsagar is a case in point. It is also an indication of the change in the direction of influence of one variety over another.

We cannot therefore, say that each dialect has a fixed status. LAV may be the subordinate variety while UAV may be the superordinate variety-but there is no evidence to show that this is likely to continue. Given the flexibility of the notion of what is acceptable and the changing socio-

economic situation, it cannot be easily predicted that UAV will maintain its position so rigidly. There a number of speakers who feel that the differences between UAV and LAV may disappear to a large extent in fifty years. In its place, we may find a third variety which could have elements of both UAV and LAV. The variety of Assamese that is used in interviews on television and daily interaction is the standard colloquial. And this also shows elements of both LAV and UAV, though at present the influence of UAV is greater. Most of the sentences used in the questionnaire were taken from conversations with people and television interviews. So, ultimately the subjects were asked to react to utterances which actually took place. Hypothetical sentences were not generated to gauge their reaction.

It was necessary to use actual utterances for testing since the study had to be situated in reality. Attitude was the issue here and we required responses to real utterances. The question of attitude took us to the realm of social psychology. In the most general terms, an attitude has been defined as a set of ideas about an object (the object could be anything- a place, an event, a person or a group of persons). The study focussed on the attitude of the subjects towards a group of people. This attitude could be favourable or unfavourable depending on the subjects' notion of acceptability or unacceptability.

The notion of acceptability was related to the subjects' preconceived notion of a standard. The standard in this study has been defined as that variety which is followed as the norm. It is maintained through the government, the media and the literature of the age. Two interesting results have emerged from the study. The first is that the subjects' responses to dialectal variation in the questionnaire show that his notion of a standard may not necessarily agree with that of another member of

his dialect group. Out of the twenty one sentences in the questionnaire, only one received a uniform response from both the LAV and the UAV speakers . The rest of the sentences had a varied response which could be explained only as a result of an individual's perception of what is acceptable or not. The idea of grammaticality or a given norm did not have as much influence on the subject's response as his/her own notion of a standard had.

The second result is that there has been a conscious effort by some speakers to include LAV in standard colloquial and literature. In fact, Assamese literature in the last few decades has shown an increasing number of LAV words. Even plays show LAV speakers using their dialect so that the characters can be dileneated realistically. A few of the writers interviewed in the study were of the opinion that LAV is imperative for an adequate representation of Assamese. This is, of course, an expected result of dialectal variation.

Another important point that we may note here is that the subjects' reaction to the guises in the Matched Guise Technique was a result of their attitude towards dialectal variation. This is based on what may be called a stereotyped image of the typical UAV or LAV speaker. The presence of certain words, the perception of nasalised or pharyngeal sounds and the attributes associated with such verbal markers create a stereotype in the mind of the Assamese speaker. Giles (1979) mentioned that we make certain generalisations about a person or a group which are based on how *we perceive* them.[1] This is reflected not only in our reaction to them, but also in our mode of interaction with them. The Assamese speakers' reaction to the guises of LAV and UAV show that they find

[1] This has been discussed in the first chapter.

UAV to be more distinct than LAV and that UAV is given a higher status than LAV. This is a result of the preconceived notion of the subjects towards the 'other'.

The question of attitude in this study was related not only to what the subject thought of the 'other' but also to what he/she thought of the variety that he/she identifies with. This was manifested in the responses to the questionnaire and the unstructured interviews. Most of the subjects reacted favourably to sentences which were similar to theirs. This implied that they were not affected in their judgements by the fact that their variety may not be the standard. Moreover, every utterance cannot be placed in a binary opposition of right or wrong. The responses to the sentences required a continuum along the acceptability scale which ranges from the least acceptable to the most acceptable.

The identification of a variety with one's way of speaking is an instance of 'in-group' and 'out-group' behaviour.[2] This is reflected in the identification of the guises with the subject's way of speaking. Most of them could identify with one of the two guises on the basis of similarity of speech and use of certain words.

Dialectal variation in Assamese is sociolinguistically significant since it triggers a response in the subjects' mind which is based entirely on the linguistic input that they get . This response is formed on the basis of the speech and reflects an attitude on the part of the subject. Our study has shown that it is possible to gauge this attitude by testing responses to linguistic phenomenon.

[2] These terms are borrowed from the sociologist W.G. Sumner (1906) who coined them to explain social behaviour.

We had mentioned before that this is an attitudinal study. The scope automatically gets limited by the subject matter. Though generalised statements have been made on the basis of the data, these may be proved or disproved by a more detailed study.

Concepts from the field of social psychology have been borrowed freely in order to provide explanations for the phenomenon in question. But in the ultimate analysis, the approach has been from the sociolinguistic point of view. The concepts from social psychology and the sociolinguistic approach have been combined here so that the data can be understood in a scientific manner. Howard Giles'(1973) explanation of change in speech style by his Speech Accomodation Theory is one such example. This is an adequate explanation for change in speech style when recording was being done. In an interaction situation, the tendency was to converge towards speech styles which were positively evaluated by the speaker. The Assamese standard was positively evaluated by the speakers and as a result they moved towards this style. Linguistic divergence, in the sense of maintaining the dialectal differences show that the standard was negatively evaluated by some, and that there was no motivitation to be included in that group. It is clear then that linguistic behaviour of the Assamese speaker is a function of intergroup communication. The Assamese speaker will accomodate his speech if he is motivated to do so by a desire for social mobility or identifies with that group. This can be related to LePage's explanation of language change in a speaker on the basis of his motivation.

Such an explanation for the verbal behaviour of the Assamese speaker was sought against the background of the history of the language and the making of a standard. The study focussed on the linguistic phenomenon which is the result of such a process of standardisation. The heirarchy

between dialects was an accepted fact in the Assamese speech community. This study has confirmed this fact.

At the same time it has also highlighted the change in the direction of influence, a change which may lead to the birth of a new variety in the standard colloquial. Such a prediction has been made possible by the subjects' responses to the various questions raised while collecting data. We can, therefore, make the following statements regarding dialectal variation in Assamese :

1. The Assamese speaker is aware of the social meaning of dialectal variation.
2. The speaker's reaction to dialectal variation is determined by the preconceived notions of a stereotype.
3. Acceptability is the measurement of an utterance in a context rather than that of a norm.
4. There is mutual influence between dialects in Assamese.

It is evident that the above are true with respect to the entire speech community though they are based on a small sample. There are a few questions, however, which remained unanswered. The most prominent among them is : what role does change in speech style have on social mobility and how is it related to one's place of origin? This could not be answered since most of the subjects were taken from similar backgrounds.

The choice of questions to be answered and the focus on certain issues may have resulted in the neglect of related issues. No study, however comprehensive, can ever claim to have answered all the questions. The present study is no exception. It suffers from this limitation which can be attributed to its limited scope. The study was based on the hypothesis

that dialectal variation conveys social meaning. Several parameters were taken into account, the most visible ones being lexical diversity, sententional differences and use of kinship terms. While the first two provided relevant information about attitude, kinship terms did not show any marked distinction between dialects. They were tested as markers of a dialect but such a distinction was becoming obliterated. Thus, while some hypotheses were proved others were disproved.

What this study has done, however, is to show that the concept of the speech community can be modified to highlight identification with a group and the fact that it is a group of people who share a similar attitude towards a language. It is the subjective attitude of the members which has been revealed in our analysis of the data.

In conclusion, it can be said that dialectal variation in Assamese is not only significant for the speakers, but also for the listeners, who are able to modify their verbal behaviour according to their expectations and attitudes regarding interpersonal and intergroup communication. It determines their behaviour as much as it is determined by them.

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Appendix I

The Questionnaire

Section A:

1. Name: 2. Age: 3.a. Place of birth:

b. Place of residence:

4. Duration of stay at present place:

5. Educational qualification:

6. Medium of education:

a.School: b.College: c.University:

7. Languages known:

Section B:

Have you heard the following words? Give meanings if 'yes'.

Words	yes/no
1.muidpʰɔl	
2.xuipʰram	
3.painpipeli	
4.kupti	
5.kurma	
6.tuilateŋa	
7.tʰouga	

Section C:

Classify the following sentences as you think appropriate into:

Substandard/ Incorrect/ Correct or Allowed (choose one)

1. moi kʰai kene jam 'I will eat and go.'

2. xei api jonik matsun 'Call that girl.'

3. toi kali gʰorot goisili neki? 'Did you go home yesterday?'

4. basor tolot pori mekritu mara gel 'The cat fell under the bus and died.'

5. basɔr tɔlɔt pori mekuritu mori gol 'The cat fell under the bus and died.'

6. xihot amar yaloi juwa kali ahisil 'They came to our house yesterday.'

7. mɔi tak koisilu akou, tak xud^{h}asun 'I told him, you can ask him.'

8. kihɛ b^{h}alɛ asa ne? 'Hello,how are you?'

9. rajib bula lorajɔn bɛya nɔhɔi kintu 'The boy called Rajiv is not really bad.'

10. rajib bula lorajɔn bɛya nɔhɔi kɛntu 'The boy called Rajiv is not really bad.'

11. garir saka p^{h}util 'The wheel of the car has burst.'

12. ratibɛla ulai jaboloi tak mɔi mana korilu ' I forbade him to go out at night.'

13. bɔjart gɛsilu, tar pɔrai ei mastu anilu 'I went to the market and got this fish from there.'

14.kapurgila d^{h}ui pɛla 'Wash those clothes.'

15. xi g^{h}ɔrɔk gɛsɛ 'He has gone home.'

16. bacatuwe taik k^{h}amusi dile 'The child grabbed at her.'

17. bacatuwe taik k^{h}amusi dile 'The child grabbed at her'

18. xoru loratuk amoni nokoribi, xantit k^{h}aba di 'Do not disturb the small boy, let him eat in peace.'

19.mɔi iman kɔm xɔmɔyɔt ei kamtu koribɔ nɔru 'I cannot do this work in such a short time.'

20. xei lorakɛtak suwasun, keŋke dauri gɛsɛ 'Look at the way those boys are running.'

21. xiyak loigɛsilu kintu kamtu nɔhɔl 'I took him with me but the work could not be done.'

Section D:

Indicate your preference for any *one* of the following words in your daily life:

A	B
1.dail	dali
2.anja	tɔrkari
3.nemu	lebu
4.siri	seri
5.magni	jurun
6.deuta	bapak
7.tita	titɛa
8.$k^hɔŋ$	rag
9.raŋa	rɔŋa
10.bɔr	dɔra

Section E:

Give the Assamese terms for the following:

1. Mother 2. Father 3. Elder brother 4. Younger brother 5. Elder sister 6. Younger sister 7. Father's younger brother 8. Father's younger brother's wife 9. Mother's younger sister 11. Father's younger sister 12. Father's younger sister's husband 13. Mother's elder sister 14. Father's elder brother 15. Grandfather 16. Grandmother.

Appendix II

Phonetic transcriptions of the texts used in the

Matched Guise Technique:

V1 a. Formal speech of LAV speaker:

Passage A

uttɔr lokʰimpurɔr pɔra prai pɔndʰɔrɔ kilumetar nilɔgɔt amguri moujar sukɔt kali xɔndʰiya prai sarɛatʰ bɔjat xena bahini aru alpʰar majɔt xuwa guliya gulit ɛjɔn juwɔnɔr mrtyuke dʰori ɛgɔraki mohila ahɔtɔ hɔi. prɔkax jɛ alpʰar xuwɔnxiri ancolik prɔxɔdɔr dara udjapitɔ xɔŋgɔtʰɔntur ɔstadɔk protistʰa dibɔxɔr pɔra gʰuri ahutɛ dujɔn alpʰar ugrɔpɔntʰi aru xɛna bahinir mukʰa mukʰi hɔŋgɔrhɔt xena bahinir trtiyɔ mɔharus rɛjiment jɔisʰri bʰutan namɔr ɛjɔn juwɔnɔr mrtyu hɔi. guliya gulit uktɔ ɔncɔlɔr aijoni bʰuya namɔr pɔncas bosoriya ɔbibahitɔ mohilar gʰɔrɔr bʰitɔrɔt dʰan basi tʰɔka ɔbɔstat bɛr bʰaŋi guli xumai pɛtɔt lagi ahɔtɔ hɔi. bɔrtɔman teuk uttɔr lokʰimpurɔr ɔxamɔrik sikitsalɔyɔt bʰɔrti kɔra hoisɛ jodiyu mohila gɔraki hɔŋkɔt mukɔtɔ nɔhɔi.

Translation: One army jawan was killed and a woman was injured in a shoot-out between the army and the Ulfa at Amguri mouja about fifteen kilometers from North Lakhimpur at eight-thirty last evening. It was said that the jawan Joishree Bhutan who belonged to the third regiment was killed when the army and the ULFA was caught in the shoot-out when the ULFA was returning from the eighteenth foundation day celebration organised by the Subansiri regional cadre of the organisation. In the shoot-out, an unmarried fifty year old woman named Aijoni Bhuyan was

hit in the stomach by a stray bullet which pierced the wall of her house as she was sorting out the paddy. She has been admitted to the civil hospital in North Lakhimpur but her condition is still serious.

Passage B

ussɔ hikʰar kʰɛtrɔt bidexi bʰaxak pradʰanyɔ dibɔlogiya hɔi karɔn bʰarɔtiyɔ bʰaxaxɔmuhɔr jɔtʰɛstɔ unnɔti huwa sɔtteu xɔmrdʰir goti apekʰikbʰabɛ lehemiya hɔi ase. matri bʰaxak ɔnadɔr korile matri bʰaxar eku kʰyoti nɔhobo pare, kintu kʰyoti amar nicʰoi hobo. ei xɔtyɔtu upɔlobdʰi kori yar bixɔyɛ kiba koribɔloi guri dʰorisil gʰaikoi xɔmajɔr ataitkoi xikʰitɔ ɔŋhɔ satrɔ satri xɔmajɛ, raijɔr axirbad loi.

Translation: It becomes necessary to give importance to foreign languages in higher education because though Indian languages have developed, their progress has not been as fast as expected. If we disrespect our mother tongue, the mother tongue will not come to harm, but we will. Having realised this truth, the student section had come forward to do something about it, with the blessings of the people.

V1b. Informal speech of LAV speaker:

tɛptu ɔlɔp bɔndʰɔ kɔrɔk. muk agɔte kɔtʰatu huni loba diyok. ɛŋkɛ mɔi kɔba nɔru. mɔi tarmane ki kɔba lagbɔ heitu kɔuk. ɛnɛlisis ki kɔrba lagbɔ heitu kɔuk. bʰahatu tarmane xotyɔ hɔi ne nɔhɔi. xotyɔu kɔba nɔru ɔxɔtyou kɔba nɔru.

Translation: Put off the tape. Let me listen to what the matter is. I cannot say it this way. Tell me what I really have to say. Tell me what analysis I

will have to do. This means whether the language is true or not. I cannot say that it is true or that it is not true.

V2a. Formal speech of UAV speaker:

Passage A

uttɔr lɔkʰimpurɔr pɔra prai puɔndʰɔrɔ kilumetar nilɔgɔt amguri moujar sukɔt kali xɔndʰiya prai sarɛatʰ bɔjat xena bahini aru alpʰar majɔt xuwa guliya gulit ɛjɔn juwɔnɔr mrtyuke dʰori ɛgɔraki mohila ahɔtɔ hɔi. prɔkax jɛ alpʰar xuwɔnxiri ancolik prɔxɔdɔr dara udjapitɔ xɔŋgɔtʰɔntur ɔstadɔk protistʰa dibɔxɔr pɔra gʰuri ahutɛ dujɔn alpʰar ugrɔpɔntʰi aru xɛna bahinir mukʰa mukʰi hɔŋgɔrhɔt xena bahinir trtiyɔ mɔharus rɛjiment jɔisʰri bʰutan namɔr ɛjɔn juwɔnɔr mrtyu hɔi. guliya gulit uktɔ ɔncɔlɔr aijoni bʰuya namɔr pɔncas bosoriya ɔbibahitɔ mohilar gʰɔrɔr bʰitɔrɔt dʰan basi tʰɔka ɔbɔstat bɛr bʰaŋi guli xumai pɛtɔt lagi ahɔtɔ hɔi. bɔrtɔman teuk uttɔr lɔkʰimpurɔr ɔxamɔrik sikitsalɔyɔt bʰɔrti kɔra hoisɛ jodiyu mohila gɔraki hɔŋkɔt muktɔ nɔhɔi.

Translation: One army jawan was killed and a woman was injured in a shoot-out between the army and the Ulfa at Amguri mouja about fifteen kilometers from North Lakhimpur at eight-thirty last evening. It was said that the jawan Joishree Bhutan who belonged to the third regiment was killed when the army and the ULFA was caught in the shoot-out when the ULFA was returning from the eighteenth foundation day celebration organised by the Subansiri regional cadre of the organisation. In the shoot-out, an unmarried fifty year old woman named Aijoni Bhuyan was hit in the stomach by a stray bullet which pierced the wall of her house as she was sorting out the paddy. She has been admitted to the civil hospital in North Lakhimpur but her condition is still serious.

Passage B

yar usɔrɔr karjilar rɛpid ɛksɛn fors (ar e ɛf)ɔr souxɔdɔt tini hejar duxɔ kilugram ujɔnɔr mɔhindrɔ traək ɛk^{h}ɔn sɔlɔntɔ ɔbɔstat gar upɔrɛrɛ par xoi jaboloi di d^{h}anbadɔr ɛjɔni ut^{h}ɔrɔ bosoriya kɔlejiya satriyɛ bissɔ ɔb^{h}ilex srsti kɔre. sunita siŋ namɔr ei satri gɔrakiyɛ tini bɔsɔr agɔtɛ pund^{h}ɔrɔxɔ pɔnsas kilogram ujɔnɔr ɛk^{h}ɔn ɛmbɛsadɔr gar upɔredi par hoi jaboloi diyar p^{h}ɔlɔt tɛur nam ginis buk of rekɔrdɔt ɔntɔrb^{h}uktɔ xoisil. pas p^{h}ut sari insir ussɔtɔr pɔspɔnnɔ kilogram ujɔnɔr sunitai hɔki stik hatɔt loi t^{h}aki trak k^{h}ɔn par hoi jaboloi diyɛ.

Translation: An eighteen year old college student of Dhanbad has created a world record by allowing a Mahindra truck weighing three thousand kilograms to pass over her body, in the premises of the Rapid Action Force (RAF). Three years ago, this student named Sunita Singh had entered the Guiness Book of Records as a result of allowing an Ambassador weighing one thousand five hundred and fifty kilograms to pass over her body. Sunita who is five feet four inches tall, and weighs fifty five kilograms, used a hockey stick to let the truck pass over her.

V2 b.Informal speech of UAV speaker:

ɛ ratipuwa sɔta bɔjat yar pɔra ulai goisu. ɛ jagirodɔt namisu. jagirodɔt nami pɛlai pi dabliudi ɔfisɔt goisu. tar pisɔt tar pɔra informes^{h}ɔn loi pɛlai, quarit kraŠar eta ase, kraŠarɔt goi pɔlai tar informes^{h}ɔn loi pɛlai, jibilak manux ei metriyal ase, xeibilakɔr informesɔn loi pɛlai nɔgao golu. nɔgaot goi ki hol gari k^{h}ɔn hutɛlɔt asilɛ, gari k^{h}ɔn gusi ahilɛ. tarsɔt dɔs minit hoi gol buli koise. tetiya mɔi bas ɛk^{h}ɔnɔt ut^{h}i pɛlai koisu muk gari k^{h}ɔn d^{h}ɔrai

diyɔk. riqwest korilu aru manuxtuk. ɔlɔp dur goie gari kʰɔn palu aru. xixɔtɔk ɔlɔp dʰɔmki dilu aru, muk aeri tʰoi kelei gusi ahili tɔhɔti. tarsɔt ahi pɛlai heri kraʃar dutat golu. ə quari kraʃar dutar pɔra sɛmpl anilu, stonɔr sɛmpl bilak. ahi pɛlai etiya xat ta bɔjat guwahati paisu.

Translation : I went out at six in the morning. Stopped at Jagiroad. Went ot the PWD office at Jagiroad. After getting some information from there we went to the crusher in the quarry and got some information about some material there. Then we went to Nagaon. What happened in Nagaon was, the car was in the hotel and it went off. And they said it was more than ten minutes ago. Then I caught a bus and requested them to help me catch the car. After going for some distance I could catch the car. I scolded them and asked them why they had left me behind. Then we went to two crushers and collected samples from there, the stone samples. Now I have reached Guwahati at seven o'clock.