



## 'NAGAMESE' FROM PIDGIN TO CREOLE: A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE LINGUA FRANCA OF NAGALAND

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[doi.org/10.33329/rjelal.74.82](https://doi.org/10.33329/rjelal.74.82)



### ABSTRACT

Nagaland is a multilingual state in India is said to be a goldmine for the linguist for its rich language diversity. English a foreign language is the official language of the state and Nagamese is the lingua franca of its people along with English. It is fascinating to witness the rapid development of Nagamese in Nagaland from a mere contact language to now a Creole Language .The main focus of this paper is to understand the different factors that have contributed to the development of Nagamese in Nagaland.

Key word: Pidgin, Creole

Pidgin: a language that has developed from a mixture of two languages.

Creole: A Creole is a language that has developed from Pidgin and become the main language in a particular place

### About Nagaland

Nagaland is a beautiful mountainous state with diverse socio-linguistics setting covering an area of 16,579 square kilometres (6,401 sq mi) with a population of 1,980,602 (2011 Census of India) and one of the Northeast States of India. Nagaland became the 16<sup>th</sup> state of India in 1963. This strategic Eastern Frontier State of India borders with the state of Assam to the west, Arunachal Pradesh and Assam to the north, Myanmar to the east, and Manipur to the south. Kohima is the state capital and the largest city is Dimapur which also serve as the commercial hub.

The people of Nagaland are known as the 'Nagas', it is an exonym given by the British during colonial period. Nagas are believed to be a race of Indo-Mongoloid and they are multi tribal community. Nagaland is inhabited by several tribes,

there are 17 tribes recognised by the state government with each tribes having a specific geographical distribution. Every tribe have its own distinct tradition, culture and language though they share many cultural traits. There are 16 recognised languages in Nagaland and about 60 spoken dialects belonging to Tibeto-Burman language family. Each Naga languages have a maximum of around 2 lakh (two hundred thousand) only, with exception to Tenyidie which has around 16 lakh as it represent seven tribes.

Most Nagas are traditionally Animistic and brutal tradition such as head-hunting was practice till the advent of Christianity which came with colonial rule. In present day, 90% of Nagas are Christian with a literacy rate of 73.45%. Most Nagas live in rural areas and their main economy is agriculture. Nagaland in present scenario is a perfect

blend of tradition with modernisation, where people are still deep rooted in their culture but at the same time at par with the modern world in their outlook.

#### **Origin of Nagamese:**

The origin of Nagamese can be traced back from the early interaction of the hill Naga people with the indigenous people of Assam in the plains. The absence of any form of common language triggered the need to develop a trade language and as a result Nagamese was developed solely for trade purpose and used primarily as a market language to communicate for trade. The earliest record of Nagamese is found in Hutton (1921) with a few lexical items and phrases in the pidgin.

#### **Factors contributing to the growth and development of Nagamese:**

##### 1. Nagamese is a lingua franca of the Nagas

In context of Nagaland, English and Nagamese are the lingua franca for the people. However, English could not compete with Nagamese as it is formally learned and therefore the language is always treated as exclusive. On the other hand Nagamese learned and blend in without any formality makes the learner a feeling of ease to use the language. Hence, Nagamese is the more popular language for communication for all Nagas irrespective of education and occupation.

##### 2. Absence of a common Language

The absent of a common language among the Naga's is one major factor that has contributed to the growth and development of Nagamese as no tribe wants another tribe to overpower them. The selection of a particular tribe language as the common language will lead to a complex situation. Language diversity is the hallmark for the Nagas and in such scenario a language which is foreign or do not represent any section of its people manage to get the approval of the people. This is the main fact that Nagamese along with English could lay its foundation in the Naga society.

##### 3. Mixed marriage

Every tribe has its own language and further within a tribe there are numerous of dialect. In inter tribe marriage; especially in urban settings it has

been observed that children learned Nagamese as their first language and in worst case where they even fail to learn their mother tongue. This results in the change of paradigm for Nagamese as it slowly moving from Pidgin to Creole.

##### 4. Church and Government support

The two spearheads that are responsible for developing Nagamese in Nagaland are the church and the government. Nagaland is a state where church plays a dominant role in every aspect of social issues. Nagamese recognition as one of the church council under Nagaland Baptist Church Council (NBCC) is a major milestone for the language. There are 36 churches under Nagamese Baptist Church Association (NBCA).

On other hand, Government in order to reach the mass use Nagamese as medium of communication for many of its programme such as creating awareness for a disease or immunization. The government also regard Nagamese and a News programme in Nagamese 'Prasar Bharati' and other entertainment programme in Nagamese are aired by All India Radio. This has further strengthened the development of Nagamese.

##### 5. Media in form of music, movies, newspaper and videos

Media should also be credited for popularising Nagamese. Nagamese videos, songs, movies and stand up comedy are creating a vibe in the society which is gaining more popularity with easy access to internet. 'Nagamese Khobor' daily news online is first of its kind and all these development ensures the further progress of the language.

##### 6. Increase of non-locals

Nagaland has a surplus of labour from other states such as Bihar and Assam. This situation only promotes Nagamese. Nagamese being an Indo Aryan language makes it easier for Hindi speaker's labourers who are from Bihar and Assam. The market language which is Nagamese is also an advantage for these people.

Table 1.A comparative word table

Sl.no.	English	Hindi	Nagamese
1	Yesterday	Kal	Kali
2	News	Khabar	Khobor
3	Head	Sir	Matha

7. Household helpers and Baby sitter influence

The urban Nagas employ household helpers and baby sitter from remote villages of Nagaland and Assam. This trend has directly expose children to Nagamese at early age as Nagamese in this case is the only medium of communication for such situation. Hence, the impact of helpers at home also contributes to the development of Nagamese.

The above factors has popularised and assist the development of Nagamese and it is no longer a pidgin language but a Creole language of the Nagas.

**Present status of Nagamese**

Nagamese has secured itself in Nagaland, and it has truly developed from Pidgin to a Creole Language. Though English is the only official Language for the State of Nagaland, It is assume that Nagamese is unofficially the official language in Nagaland. This statement is not an exaggeration but a reality. Nagamese is more popular and more widely use than English in context of communication among Nagas. Nagamese language is use in every aspects of the Naga society be it in work place, market, schools, entertainment, sermon, speech and so on.

Nagamese is an integral part of the Naga Society though it is yet to achieve a high prestige status. In reality, Nagamese is received as language which is not a standard language and there are adversaries that labelled Nagamese as a mere contact language threatening the indigenous language of the Nagas. Advocates for Nagamese are also attempting to Standardised the language and it is in the process of codification. With the release of Nagamese Bible in 2018 by Bible society of India, where new words in Nagamese are coined, standardised spellings and word meaning were initiated.

**Conclusion**

This paper is an attempt to understand the development of pidgin language and also ignite a thought that a contact language has more advantage than the indigenous languages in a multi lingual setting. The questions that we ask are - Will the indigenous languages lose out to a pidgin language? Our indigenous language is reflection of culture and identity. Or can a Creole/Pidgin co-exist with our indigenous languages without threatening each other existence. It is true that language only enrich us and therefore community should embrace all language, however one should be cautious to promote one’s indigenous language too.

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