Lost in Translation! Exploring Oral and Written Narratives of Cultural and Linguistic Minority Indigenous Students of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh

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Lost in Translation!
Exploring Oral and Written Narratives of Cultural and Linguistic Minority Indigenous Students of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh

Qualifying Paper

Submitted by
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December 30, 2017
Lost in Translation!

Exploring Oral and Written Narratives of Cultural and Linguistic Minority Indigenous Students of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh

Introduction and Background

In the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) (Appendix A), a remote region in the south-eastern corner of Bangladesh, children from indigenous mountain tribes are among the country’s most illiterate and at the highest risk of dropping out of school (UNDP, 2009). Their school achievement and completion rate fall disastrously short when compared to the majority, Bangla-speaking children. Fewer than 35% of indigenous children complete elementary education and fewer than 8% complete secondary education, whereas nationwide 74% of the children complete elementary 55% complete secondary education (Barkat et. al., 2009, Integrated Regional Information Networks [IRIN], 2011).

There are many possible explanations for the high failure rates of indigenous children. Most of them speak one of a variety of Tibeto-Burman languages\(^1\) (L1) at home, but all schooling is conducted in Indo-Aryan language Bangla (L2), the language of the majority, with few accommodations to the linguistic or cultural backgrounds of the children. These children also come from homes that provide little preparation for the schooling model in the region. Adults in more than half of all indigenous households lack formal schooling (Barkat et al., 2009). Furthermore, the schooling model relies heavily on rote memorization and high-stakes assessment - national criterion-referenced examinations administered in Bangla in fifth, eighth, tenth and twelfth grades (Barkat et al., 2009; Hasnat, 2017). Indigenous students perform poorly

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\(^1\) Marma, Mro, Tripura, etc., are Tibeto-Burman languages spoken by the indigenous peoples of Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh.
in these L2 based examinations. For example, pass rates on the 5th grade high-stakes examinations are 35% for indigenous children as compared to 72% for majority Bangla speakers (Barkat et. al., 2009).

The children of the indigenous hill tribes of Bangladesh confront challenges common to minority groups in many different political and sociological contexts – cultural and linguistic minority indigenous communities (Francis & Reyhner, 2002; Hornberger, 1997), immigrant enclaves in western countries (Van Tubergen & Kalmijn, 2005), post-colonial countries that have adopted schooling in English or French (Phillipson, 1996), displaced populations that perforce attend school in the common language of a refugee camp or resettlement site (Matthews, 2008; Taylor & Sidhu, 2012). Such children often experience ethnic, religious, cultural, or linguistic discrimination from the majority society. Their languages may still be vital for familial and village communication but are often forbidden or at best ignored at school. Literacy instruction is available only in the language of schooling even though considerable cultural and social capital reside in their home language (Ruiz, 2010). These factors are exacerbated for the children of CHT by militarization, massacres, government sponsored mass migration of settlers, and forcible displacement of indigenous people (Barnes et al., 1997; Chittagong Hill Tracts Commission, 1991; D’Costa, 2014; Levene, M. 1999). Moreover, for the last 41 years, government restrictions prohibited access of foreigners and researchers into the region (Survival International, 2015). As a result, there is a dearth of quality research on education and deplorable dropout of over half a million indigenous children. The children who fell behind the most received the least amount of resources and left understudied for a long period of time.

**A modest effort at improvement.** Even minimal use of home languages in settings of second-language schooling has been shown to promote engagement and improve achievement, perhaps
by acknowledging the students’ cultural resources, identities, and abilities (De Houwer, 2007; Dolson, 1985; Kohnert et al., 2005). A first effort to test the feasibility of introducing the home language and culturally relevant content in the CHT schools involved asking students to elicit traditional stories from grandparents or other elders, then to tell these stories to their classmates. Ninety-eight students in grades 4-8 in three schools participated in this pilot effort. They told stories in Marma, one of the languages spoken by indigenous people of CHT, with great enthusiasm and to the appreciation of their classmates.

As an extension activity, these students were then asked to submit the same traditional stories in writing. Approaches to accomplishing this task, in light of the fact that none of the students had learned to write using the orthography of their home language\(^2\), were varied. While a handful of students wrote their stories in Bangla, most of the students wrote their stories in their first language but adapted Bangla script to represent that language (Appendix F). There is no conventional transliteration of the home languages into Bangla, so this constituted in every case a task of inventing a spelling system.

**This study.** A casual examination of the oral and written narratives revealed very clearly that the oral narratives were much longer. It thus became of interest to compare the oral and written narratives, seeing the written narratives as, in a sense, a transitional form – culturally relevant content rendered in school-approved form. Five oral-written story pairs were randomly selected from each grade, 4\(^{th}\) through 8\(^{th}\), for further analysis, to determine what features of the oral

\(^2\)Marma language has its own script (Appendix B), however, it is not taught in the schools. Only a few elders and Buddhist monks know how to read and write using Marma script. Moreover, since there is no standard transcription guide for spelling Marma with the Bangla script, students spell the same Marma word using Bangla script in different ways.
stories were, in effect, lost in translation to written form. The gap between oral and written stories across grades was also analyzed to determine whether students in higher grades developed better writing skills. Specific research questions were:

**RQ 1. What are the differences between oral and written narratives of indigenous CHT students from 4th to 8th grades?**

**RQ 2: Does the gap between the oral and written narratives decrease in higher grades?**

If the students’ knowledge displayed in their oral presentation is not visible in their writing that should suggest that students struggle to express in writing the content they already know and can express verbally. Additionally, whether the gap between their oral and written narratives shrinks in higher grades may provide an indication of their progress in writing skill across elementary to secondary grades in schools.

**Research Design**

**Participants and Data Collection**

Ninety-eight students from fourth to eighth grade at three schools from the CHT region (Figure 1) interviewed parents, grandparents, or village elders to elicit traditional tales, and they were asked to share these narratives in classrooms in the language they felt most comfortable using. The overwhelming majority of indigenous students chose to tell their narratives in their home language (L1), either in Marma or in Mro languages. These oral narratives were audio recorded. Students also submitted their narratives in a written format using the Bangla script, the only orthography to which children are exposed in school. Though 98 narratives had been collected, for practical reasons the analysis was limited to 75 narratives, which were told and written both
in *Marma*\(^3\). Then five pairs of oral and written narratives were randomly selected from each of the five grades (4\(^{th}\) – 8\(^{th}\)), resulting in 50 narratives from 25 students. These oral and written narratives are compared using new measures developed as part of this study.

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\(^3\) The 23 stories not included are told and written in *Mro* or *Chak*, other indigenous languages of the same region. I excluded these 23 narrative due to lack of resources and limited number of qualified research assistants who can speak these languages and read and write *Bangla* well. Since these students face similar challenges of learning in *Bangla*, a language different from their mother tongues, and come from the same region and from similar socioeconomic background, the reduction of sample from 98 to 75 will unlikely significantly bias the results and key findings.
I observed that in all three schools, the total number of students declined substantially in higher grades. While there were 82 students in the fourth grade, on average, only 11 students remain in the eighth grade (Table 1). This sharp decline in student number is likely due, in large part, to student dropout. More than 58% of students dropped out after fifth grade when students take their first nationwide high stakes written examination. The students who survived the high stakes examinations and promoted to higher grades are likely have higher proficiency in Bangla compared to those students who dropped out.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Number of Students</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4th</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5th</td>
<td>67</td>
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<tr>
<td>6th</td>
<td>28</td>
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<td>7th</td>
<td>17</td>
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<td>8th</td>
<td>11</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Average Number of Students in 4th-8th Grade

Measures

There have been multiple studies on narrative analysis (Propp, 1968, Labov & Waletzky, 1997, Riessman, 1993, and LWin, 2010) that apply different measures. Although some of the measures used in these studies are relevant to this research, there are limitations to applying one single approach to analyzing children’s narratives in the CHT context.
Thus, to compare oral and written narratives, I draw on previously used and newly created descriptive count and Likert-type rating scales (Table 2). For the count measures, I use word count as an indicator of the length of the narrative. Studies have shown that essay length, among other factors, is strongly correlated with essay ratings (Kobrin, 2007; Larsen-Freeman & Storm, 1977). I added a new measure, count of adjectives and adjective phrases, as another indicator of quality. Adjectives are used to describe the qualities of characters and their psychological and emotional states (Kirchner, 1969). Studies have shown that skilled students use a larger number of adjectives in their narratives than unskilled students (Kamimura, 2016). Narrators may use adjectives to describe an emotional state, or to vividly paint a clearer picture, or to provide a detailed message to the audience.

**Table 2: Criteria for Evaluating Narrative**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Count Measures</th>
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<tr>
<td>Word Count</td>
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<td>Adjective Count</td>
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<tr>
<th>Rating Measures</th>
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<tr>
<td>Identification of Protagonist (1-5)</td>
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<td>Functional Events (1-5)</td>
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<td>Temporal or Causal Linkage (1-5)</td>
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<td>Dialogues or Monologues (1-5)</td>
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<td>Overall Cohesiveness (1-5)</td>
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</table>
For the rating measures, I consider an array of indicators of narrative structure. First, I examined how the narratives identified and introduced protagonists (Appendix C). Detailed and timely introduction of protagonists in relation to other characters contributes to better understanding of characters’ actions and events (Propp, 1968). Second, I identified functional events based on Propp’s (1968) classification scheme (Appendix D). Functional events, actions of characters that bring a change of state, are the most fundamental elements of narratives (Toolan, 1988). Third, I examined whether the narratives used linkage, temporal or causal, to establish a connection between functional events (Labov & Waletzky, 1997; LWin, 2010) (Appendix E). The incidence of temporal and causal linkages between events constitutes the storyline of a narrative and contributes to better understanding protagonists’ actions. Fourth, I recorded the use of monologues and dialogues (Appendix F). Use of dialogues and monologues indicates the narrator’s ability to take perspectives of characters and present a character’s view and voice (Smith et al, 2009). Fifth, I added a new rating for overall coherence and effectiveness of communication of the narrative. Coherence plays an important role in understanding relationships among the story elements and communicative effectiveness provides a measure of how well the audience can access the idea communicated in the narrative.

There are many limitations to translations from one language to another language, for example, differences in language structure, idioms and expressions, compound words, multiple meaning, and metaphors, among others (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Nes et al. 2010; Otis, 2008;
Polkinghorne, 2005). To eliminate the needs for translation and minimize misinterpretation of narratives, I recruited local indigenous college graduates, who are fluent in both *Marma* and *Bangla* languages, to rate the narratives. In addition, I developed a rating manual and trained all raters by conducting rating exercises, individually rating narratives followed by group discussions, using four sets of narratives to establish a baseline and common understanding for rating narratives. For each of the rating category of items, three raters rated using a Likert scale as presented in the Appendices C-E. Internal analyses of this data showed reasonable inter-rater agreement (an average of 0.81 across items), with different variability in the rating of oral and written narratives.

In order to further explore the reliability of rating scores and variability in oral and written narratives, I conducted a Generalizability study (G-study) as well as a Decision Study (D-study). In this case, each of these 25 student’s narratives (p) were rated by three raters (r) using all 5 items (i), in a fully crossed design (Table 3 shows sample scores).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Rater</th>
<th>Item 1</th>
<th>Item 2</th>
<th>Item 3</th>
<th>Item 4</th>
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Table 3: Fully Crossed Design using Student Narrative X Rater X Items Shows Raters’ Scores

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<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Item 1 = Identification of Protagonist, Item 2 = Functional Events, Item 3 = Temporal or Causal Linkage, Item 4 = Dialogues or Monologues, Item 5 = Overall Cohesiveness*

The components of a score ($X_{pir}$) of a particular student narrative ($p$) for a particular item ($i$) by a particular rater ($r$) can be expressed as:

$$X_{pir} = \mu + v_p + v_i + v_r + v_{pi} + v_{pr} + v_{ir} + v_{pir,e}$$

Where $\mu$ = overall mean, $v_p$ = student effect, $v_i$ = item effect, $v_r$ = rater effect, $v_{pi}$ = student and item effect, $v_{pr}$ = student and rater effect, $v_{ir}$ = rater and item effect, and $v_{pir,e}$ = residual student-rater-item interactions effect.

These measurements demonstrate that written narrative scores show high reliability with one rater (0.78) or with two raters (0.87) using five items (Figure 3). These results indicate that even one rater may be sufficient to achieve a reliable score for written narratives.
On the other hand, oral narrative scores show only moderate reliability. Using five items and two raters, the reliability is approximately 0.75 (Figure 3) indicating that at least two raters are necessary to achieve a reliable score. Since this study includes three raters, the rating measurements are sufficient to achieve reliable scores both in oral and written narratives. Even though oral narrative measurements are not as good as written, they are strong enough to be used reliably.

**Analysis**

To answer research question 1, on the differences between oral and written narratives, I analyzed both count measures and rating measures. For count measures, I calculated average differences between oral and written narratives, then used a $t$-statistic to examine whether these averages are significantly different from zero. For the rating quality indicators, I calculated
average rating scores of oral and written narratives on five items - identification of protagonists, functional events, causal and temporal linkage, use of dialogues and monologues, and overall coherence. Then I performed a *t*-test to determine statistical significance. In addition, I conducted a qualitative review of narratives from two students to get a more comprehensive view of the quality of the narratives.

To answer research question 2 - whether the gap between oral and written narratives of indigenous students is smaller in higher grades – I analyzed the differences between average oral and written narrative count scores and rating scores of students from 4th grade to 8th grade. This cross-sectional data over five grades helps us understand whether the oral and written narratives converges, diverges, or remains the same across grades.

**Results**

The findings from the analysis of the data showed large discrepancies between the lengths of oral and written narratives. For oral narratives, the mean word count is 1360 words with a median of 1169 words. For written narratives, the mean word count is 588 words with a median of 613 words (Table 4). On average, then, the oral narratives are 232% longer than the written narratives. The *t* statistic shows that this difference is statistically significant *t* (24) = 2.52, *p* = .01.

**Table 4: Scores of Oral and Written based on Criteria for Narrative Evaluation**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria for Narrative Evaluation</th>
<th>Oral</th>
<th>Written</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Count Measures</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word Count</td>
<td>1360</td>
<td>588</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjective Count</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rating Measures</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identification of Protagonist (1-5)</td>
<td>4.67</td>
<td>3.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Functional Events (1-5)</td>
<td>4.50</td>
<td>2.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temporal or Causal Linkage (1-5)</td>
<td>3.55</td>
<td>1.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dialogues or Monologues (1-5)</td>
<td>4.50</td>
<td>2.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall Cohesiveness (1-5)</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>2.83</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The findings also indicate large discrepancies in adjective counts between oral and written narratives. For Oral narratives, the mean adjective count is 41 while for written narratives, the mean adjective count is 16. On average, oral narratives contain 2.5 times more adjectives than written narratives. The paired $t$-test indicates that the difference is statistically significant $t(24) = 3.92, p = .015$.

Although variations exist among students, the general trend supports the primacy of oral over written narratives. Within individuals, oral narratives are 20% to 400% longer than written narratives (Figure 3), indicating that students struggle more in producing written than spoken
narratives. Even in the best cases, the length of oral narratives exceeded the length of written narratives.

Figure 3: Word count of oral and written narratives of twenty-five students

In ratings of narrative components, oral narratives on average scored higher than written narratives in all five categories (Table 4). In Identification of Protagonists, oral narratives were rated 4.67 while written narratives are scored as 3.33. In Functional Events, oral narratives were rated 4.50 while written narratives were rated 2.83, on average. The largest difference in ratings comes from the Temporal and Causal Linkage; on average, oral narratives were rated almost twice as high, at 3.55 while written narratives were rated 1.83. In addition, oral narratives were
rated higher than written narratives in the use of dialogues and monologues, 4.50 for oral and 2.67 for written. Finally, oral narratives were rated higher than written narratives in overall cohesiveness.

**Variations across Grades**

Results suggest that, on average, the word count of both oral and written narratives is greater in higher grades (Figure 4). Rating scores of written narratives are lower than oral narratives throughout the elementary grades and remained relatively stable until 7th grade, after which they showed a small improvement. The gap between oral and written narratives remained relatively constant from 4th-6th grade and became marginally narrower in 7th-8th grade. The result in 7th-8th grade may be, in part, due to the fact that the small number of students who passed high stakes examinations and subsequently promoted to higher grades had higher level of writing skills than those who dropout out in lower grades (Table 1).
Figure 4: Average word count of oral and written narratives across grades

Qualitative Review of Narratives

To illustrate the findings above, I selected two paired narratives for in-depth analysis. The following example (Table 5) presents the beginning section of a narrative that comes from The Lion and the Frog story presented by a fifth-grade student. The oral narrative word count is over five times that of the written narrative (132 versus 24 words). The oral narrative also provides a richer and more comprehensive message to the audience. For example, the written narrative starts with “One day the lion woke up because a frog was making a loud noise.” The same section was narrated orally as, “One day, the lion was taking a nap by a lake. The frog started calling loud, really loud. Then the sound woke up the lion...” Additionally, the oral narrative contains more adjectives, which helps to paint more vivid and colorful picture. For example, the oral narrative describes the frog’s feelings: “The frog was scared, and he politely replied...” The written narrative did not provide any adjectives to describe the feelings of the frog.

Both oral and written narratives identified the protagonists. However, the oral narrative contains three dialogues between the lion and frog, while the written narrative contains no dialogues or monologues. These dialogues help better describe linkage between functional events. For example, when the lion says, “You little frog, you have the audacity to speak ill about the king of the jungle. I’ll catch you and punish you so bad that no one dares to talk to me
like this” and then jumps to catch the frog, readers can see a clear linkage between the lion’s words and his actions. The written narrative provided clues to the lion’s action with the text, “He became angry at the frog. He started chasing the frog;” however, the oral narrative provides a stronger causal and temporal linkage of functional events and a richer context that communicates motivation, feelings, and actions of the protagonists.

Table 5: Sample texts from oral and written narratives from Lion and Frog

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Oral Narrative – Lion and Frog</th>
<th>Written Narrative – Lion and Frog</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One day, the lion was taking a nap by a lake. The frog started calling loud, really loud. Then then the sound woke up the lion and he became mad. He told the frog, “don’t you have any sense, you are screaming loud, and it woke me up.”</td>
<td>One day the lion woke up because a frog was making a loud noise. He became angry at the frog. He started chasing the frog.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The frog was scared, and he politely replied, “Dear Sir, calling is our habit. Moreover, when you roar, the whole jungle shakes. But we do not complain. Why do you complain when we call?”</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>The lion became furious, “You little frog, you have the audacity to speak ill about the king of the jungle.</td>
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I’ll catch you and punish you so badly that no one dares to talk to me like this.” The lion jumped into the lake to catch and punish the frog.

In the following example of oral and written narratives of A King and People (Table 6), the oral narrative contains an introduction and sets the stage that provides a context of the narratives. The student introduces herself and says, “I study in eighth grade and I am from, I come from Chidai village, I am from Thancha Upozilla (a sub-district), and it is in Bandarban district. The story I am about to tell is about a king who lived a long time ago. I heard this story from my father.” The written narrative, on the other hand, provides no such introduction.

The oral narrative also provides a richer description of the characters and sets the stage for linkage with functional events. The oral narrative describes the characteristics of two brothers as follows, “out of these two sons, the older brother was a bit shy, not so smart, and lacks knowledge and lacks intelligence. The younger brother was highly intelligent, delightful, wise, and friendly.” The written narrative provides much less description of characters. In the latter part of the story, when the actions of each of the brothers are revealed, the oral narrative can provide possible linkage to subsequent events while the written narrative does not. In addition, although both oral and written narratives include dialogues, the oral narrative provides more information and more context.
Table 6: Sample texts from oral and written narratives A King and People

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Oral Narrative – A King and People</th>
<th>Written Narrative – A King and People</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Greetings, my greetings to you all. My name is (removed). I study in eighth grade and I am from, I come from Chidai village, I am from Thanchi Upozilla (Thanchi sub-district), and it is in Bandarban district. The story I am about to tell is about a king who lived a long time ago. I heard this story from my father, his name is (removed). The writer, I, wrote the story.</td>
<td>A king had two sons. The older son did not know much and was not wise either. One day, the older one told his younger brother, when our parents pass away, how will we survive? The younger one said, “You brother, why do you worry too much.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once upon a time, there lived a king in a beautiful country. With that king, the king had two sons. With these two sons, out of these two sons, the older brother was a bit of shy, not so smart, and lacks knowledge and lacks intelligence. The younger brother was highly intelligent, delightful, wise, and friendly. The older brother one day asked, “Dear younger brother, when our parents pass away, how will we survive? How will we survive after the death of our parents?” That is what he inquired. When he said that, the younger</td>
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brother said, “oh my dear brother, why do you worry so much? We will find a way. Do not worry, when that happens we will cultivate on our lands and we will be fine.”

By reviewing both narratives side by side, it is evident that written narratives contain simpler descriptions of characters, while oral narratives contain a more complex description of characters. Oral narratives tend to provide more causal linkages between events and use more dialogues and monologues than written narratives.

Discussion

The United Nations estimates that indigenous peoples make up approximately 370 million of world’s population in over 90 countries (United Nations, 2009). Although 70% of the world’s languages are spoken by indigenous peoples, only a few of their first languages are used as languages of instruction (Walter & Benson, 2012). Despite decades of research showing that children learn best when they start learning to read in the language(s) they speak at home, most educational systems exclusively use a language of wider communication in schooling (Kosonen & Benson, 2014), and many fail even to acknowledge the children’s first language as part of their identity and as a cognitive resource (Ruiz, 2010). The children of the CHT are just one extreme example of this worldwide challenge, and thus it is not surprising that they struggle to develop proficiency in L2 and thus show poor academic outcomes (Hasnat, 2017).
The students in the CHT schools continue to display strong home language skills in oral story-telling. On all measures, including both word count and adjective count, oral narratives scored higher than written narratives. Oral narratives were, on average, more than twice as long as written narratives. Oral narratives also included 2.5 times as many adjectives as written narratives. Across the board, oral narratives were longer and contained more vivid description than written narratives. Oral narratives scored higher than written narratives in the identification of protagonists, functional events, causal and temporal linkage, use of dialogues and monologues, and overall cohesiveness. A qualitative analysis reveals that written narratives presented simpler descriptions of characters, while oral narratives provided more causal linkages between events and included more dialogues and monologues.

Overall, this suggests that indigenous students of CHT possess strong oral narrative skills in their native language, yet fail to display these skills when writing (at least when writing in an invented orthography). CHT students may not be able to express adequately in writing the content they already know and at least can express verbally, or they may be constrained by the cognitive challenges of writing their native language in a script they have learned for use in another language.

It is commonplace to observe that oral and written narratives differ on a number of features (Chafe & Tannen, 1987; Hidi, & Hildyard, 1983; Özyıldırım, 2009; Pinto, 2015; Rubin, 1987). However, for indigenous student population like those in CHT, these differences are much larger. For example, Hidi, and Hildyard (1983) found that 3rd and 4th graders’ written productions were essentially identical to their oral productions in semantic structure. Özyıldırım (2009) found that Turkish students’ (n=30) oral narratives, on average, had 43% more words
than written narratives. In comparison, CHT students’ oral narratives, on average, had 232% more words than their written narratives (Table 4),

Since oral language development contributes to written language development and indigenous students are fluent in speaking *Marma*, we might expect the gap between oral and written narratives to be smaller in higher grades. However, narrative lengths did not converge between 4th and 8th grades for the indigenous students of the CHT. Since *Marma*, using either *Marma* or *Bangla* script, is not taught in CHT classrooms and is not considered an acceptable language for academic purposes, students have no opportunity to practice and develop *Marma* oral or writing skills in schools. It may be worthwhile to formally evaluate the practice of allowing CHT students to write in *Marma* using *Bangla* script, or even of developing conventions for spelling *Marma* in *Bangla* script, in order to lessen the cognitive load associated with the translation to written form. Such an initiative may require recruiting bilingual teachers who are fluent both in *Marma* and *Bangla*.

There is evidence to support the claim that through quality writing instruction students can learn universal writing features, in addition to language-specific features, that are foundational to good writing and applicable to many languages (Puranik & Lonigan, 2009). These features may include the process of gathering and organizing ideas (Calkins, 1994; Jones, 2015; Pritchard & Honeycutt, 2007) as well as strategies for planning, drafting, revising, and editing (Graham & Harris, 2016; Kotula, Aguilar, & Tivnan, 2014; Mason, Harris, & Graham, 2011). The underdevelopment of writing skills in higher grades may indicate that CHT students made limited progress, if any, in learning the basic universal writing features.

The challenges in the CHT schools are many. The teachers have fewer years of schooling, on average, than those in the rest of Bangladesh (Ministry of Education Intermediate
and Secondary Education Boards, 2017; Nyeu, 2015), receive little pre- or in-service training in literacy development or education for minority language speakers, and mostly are ethnic Bengalis and thus monolingual in *Bangla*. In addition, the traditional curriculum emphasizes rote memorization and assessments that reward verbatim reproduction of text. Teachers spend valuable class hours in emphasizing rote memorization and verification of students’ reproduction of materials. With limited writing practice or access to feedback on their writing, students have few opportunities for improving their writing skills. These challenges limit opportunities for further education and may result in inequitable outcomes and create life-long negative consequences.

**Limitations**

There are orthographic challenges faced by students as they write down stories using L2 scripts. Since there is no standard way of writing CHT indigenous languages using *Bangla* script, students faced certain orthographic challenges. For example, the same *Marma* word can be spelled in different ways using *Bangla* script. This also poses challenges to the readers and they make the best effort in rating the narratives. To address these challenges, I recruited indigenous college graduates as raters who are fluent both in *Marma* and *Bangla*; the results show moderate to high inter-rater reliability.

In this study, measurements of written narratives show higher reliability, while oral narratives show only moderate reliability. Potential reasons for such disparity in measurements may be that oral narratives are more digressive than written narratives and thus there is more room to judge based on different aspects of oral communication. For example, repetition of words, pause in oral delivery, storytellers’ use of verbal as well as non-verbal skills, nervousness or enthusiasm or energy, etc., may influence the ratings. Modification to rating measurement
design may be necessary for higher reliability in rating oral narratives. In addition, the inclusion of qualitative review may provide a more complete measure of narratives.

There are, however, strengths and limitations to measurement instruments selected for the analysis of narratives. The use of word counts and adjective counts, and the use of ratings based on protagonists, functional events, causal and temporal linkage, and monologues and dialogues, are limited in their ability to capture the full range of determinants of communicative effectiveness. For this reason, a measure of overall coherence and communication effectiveness is added to capture the holistic quality of narratives. However, the sets of instruments used in this research may not provide a comprehensive approach to analyzing narratives.

Conclusions

Although the study reported here is limited in size and in scope, it begins to suggest the challenges of delivering effective schooling to indigenous language speakers in the CHT, and highlights themes relevant to language minority students in many places around the world. It also demonstrates that home languages and culturally relevant practices and artifacts can be introduced into highly structured second-language classrooms, with the potential to display to teachers how severely students’ language skills are underestimated by the required high-stakes assessments. This may call for reexamining strictly monolingual instruction policies for the education of language-minority students. These findings may also inform key stakeholders about the need for teacher professional development for better literacy instruction specifically designed for indigenous students in the CHT region and similar communities around the world.
References


Appendix A: Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) Region, Bangladesh

(Chittagong Hill Tracts Commission, 1991)
Appendix B: Alphabets of Bangla and Marma languages

L2 - Bangla

L1 - Marma
### Appendix C: Protagonist Scoring Criteria

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Criteria</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Identified all protagonists and introduce them in relation to others protagonists and introduced protagonists during or before describing their role in the narrative.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Identified over 80% of the protagonists, may have missed introduction of few. Protagonists are introduced in relation to others and introduced protagonists during or before describing their role in the narrative.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Identified over 60% of the protagonists, protagonists’ relationship to others were partially described or established. Protagonists’ introduction is out of order as they appeared in the narrative.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Identified over 40% of the protagonists, protagonists’ relationship with others were not established or described.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Identified 0-40% of the protagonists, protagonists’ relationship with others were not established or described.</td>
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</tbody>
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### Appendix D: Functional Events Scoring Criteria

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Criteria</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Scoring Functional Events and Linkage Between Functional Events</td>
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34
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>All functional events were described and causal or temporal linkage between functional events was established. These functional event types are similar to one or multiple Propp’s 31 event types.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Over 80% of the functional events were described, however, few causal or temporal linkages are missing between functional events. Most of these functional event types are similar to one or multiple Propp’s 31 event types.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Over 80% of the functional events were described, however causal or temporal linkages are missing between functional events. Cannot match many these events to one or multiple Propp’s 31 event types.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Over 40% of the functional events were described, however many causal or temporal linkages are missing between functional events to the point that the narrative has many disjointed events and cannot be connected to a cohesive narrative. Many of these functional event types are not similar to one or multiple Propp’s 31 event types.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Missing large number of functional events, no causal or temporal linkage between functional events have been established to the point that the narrative has many disjointed events and cannot be connected to a cohesive narrative. Most of these functional event types are not similar to one or multiple Propp’s 31 event types.</td>
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**Appendix E: Dialogues and Monologues Scoring Criteria**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Use of dialogues and Monologues</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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</table>

**Appendix F: A 6th Grade Student’s Written Narrative. Her Oral Narrative is 14 Minutes Long**

![Image of handwritten text]