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Language vitality assessment of Tutsa

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Abstract

North East India is home to a large number of languages, mostly spoken by small communities. Owing to their small population, language endangerment has become an issue in recent times, brought about by various factors like acculturation, globalisation, and neo-colonialism, where the economically powerful languages dominate other languages. In this context, it has become increasingly important to examine the vitality of languages in North East India. In this study, we assess the vitality of Tutsa, a Tibeto-Burman language spoken in the Tirap and Changlang districts of Arunachal Pradesh. The assessment is based on the nine factors proposed in the UNESCO framework. We conclude that in spite of the high intergenerational transmission and the positive attitude of community members towards the language, Tutsa is extremely vulnerable to further endangerment due to its small population, and is struggling to cope with emerging new domains due to the dominance of official languages like English and Hindi. Tutsa also lags in the production of language materials, and documentation of the language.

Keywords: Tutsa, Arunachal Pradesh, Language endangerment, Language vitality

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Language vitality assessment of Tutsa*

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1. Introduction

The issue of language endangerment is a major concern all over the world, and North East India is no exception. According to the *Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger* (Moseley, 2010), there are around 170 languages in India which are under threat, with half of these being in North East India, notably Arunachal Pradesh and Nagaland. Given the large number of endangered languages, it is not difficult to conclude that language loss will cause incalculable loss to indigenous peoples' lore, identity, and culture, and the essence of their cultural diversity. While languages have always gone extinct throughout human history, they are currently disappearing at an accelerated rate due to various factors like acculturation, globalisation, and neo-colonialism, where the economically powerful languages dominate other languages.

In this context, we examine the vitality of Tutsa (ISO 639-3: tvt), a language spoken in Arunachal Pradesh, India.



Figure 1: Map of Tirap and Changlang districts, Arunachal Pradesh.

Arunachal Pradesh is known for its cultural and linguistic diversity, where a large number of small ethnic groups inhabit a small geographical area. The Tutsa people are one such ethnic group, who inhabit the Changlang and Tirap districts of Arunachal Pradesh. The highlighted circle in Figure 1 shows the area in Tirap and Changlang districts where Tutsa villages are mostly concentrated.

According to *Glottolog*, the language is classified under the glottocode *tuts1235* and listed as Tutsa Naga (Hammarström et al., 2026). In *Ethnologue*, the language appears under the name Tutsa Naga (Eberhard et al., 2026) and rates its vitality as *Stable*, based on the Expanded Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (EGIDS), indicating that the language continues to be transmitted across generations and remains in active community use. In the *Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger* (Moseley, 2010), Tutsa is not listed as a separate language. However, we assume that it is included under Tangsa, which is listed as *Vulnerable*.

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Tutsa belongs to the Sino-Tibetan language family, specifically within the Tibeto-Burman branch. Recent scholarship offers a clearer and more precise understanding of its genetic affiliation. Post and Burling (2017) propose that Tutsa should be included in the Tangsa–Nocte subgroup, noting strong lexical and structural similarities. They further argue that Wancho could likewise be incorporated into an expanded Tangsa–Nocte–Tutsa grouping on the basis of shared vocabulary. van Dam (2018) treats Tutsa as a Northern Naga language, citing phonological and tonal affinities with Tangsa and Nocte. According to *Glottolog* (Hammarström et al., 2026), Tutsa belongs to the Tutsic subgroup of Noctean within North Patkaian, a branch of the Patkaian languages under the Brahmaputran division of the Sino-Tibetan language family.

While Tutsa is an endonym, several exonyms are used to refer to the Tutsa people by neighbouring communities and in earlier literature. According to van Dam (2018), Muklom speakers call the Tutsa *haʔtit* or *haŋsik*, while Mungre speakers use the term *tetser*. An additional alternate form, *tulsia*, is also noted by van Dam (2018). In Table C-16 of the 2011 Census of India, which classifies populations by mother tongue, Tutsa is recorded under the name ‘Tutcha Tangsa’.

The Tutsa community exhibits a clear division between two major geographical and linguistic varieties, which may be broadly classified as Upper Tutsa and Lower Tutsa. This distinction is consistently recognised by speakers across different villages, who report noticeable differences in pronunciation, lexical choices, and certain morphosyntactic patterns. Although no prior linguistic study has documented these varieties, local knowledge about dialect differentiation is well established and widely shared within the community. Beyond this broad two-way division, some speakers also report that additional variation can be seen in villages, which are not nearby. Such native-speaker observations have been substantiated in the field, which indicate small differences, especially in segmental realisation and lexical preference.

In this paper, we assess the language vitality of Tutsa by applying the nine criteria proposed in the UNESCO framework. While intergenerational transmission is high and most members of the community have a very positive attitude towards the language and supports its maintenance, an evaluation of the other factors tells us that Tutsa is extremely vulnerable to further endangerment due to its small population, and is struggling to cope with emerging new domains due to the dominance of official languages like English and Hindi. Tutsa also lags in the production of language materials, and documentation of the language.

In §2, a brief discussion is provided on the existing assessment frameworks, and the reasons for adopting the UNESCO *Language Vitality and Endangerment* framework (2003) for the present study. In §3, the methodology of the study is outlined and in §4, an assessment of the vitality of Tutsa is undertaken, based on the nine criteria. §5 concludes with a summary of the assessment.

2. Assessment Framework

The assessment of minority-language vitality necessitates a framework that brings together demographic trends, sociolinguistic processes, institutional support, and community perspectives. Over the past several decades, a range of theoretical and methodological approaches addressing language vitality and endangerment have been proposed such as, Ethnolinguistic Vitality Theory (Giles, Bourhis & Taylor, 1977), Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (GIDS) (Fishman, 1991), Expanded Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (EGIDS) (Lewis & Simons, 2010), Language Endangerment Index (LEI) (Lee & Van Way, 2016). Beyond these assessment frameworks, Dixon (1991), Kinkade (1991), Crystal (2000), Krauss (2007), and Wurm (2007) provide a broader theoretical discussion on language maintenance, shift, and decline. Conceptual and methodological reflections on vitality assessment have further highlighted the need for multidimensional and context-sensitive evaluation (Sasse, 1992, 2001; Landweer, 2000).

Although these approaches provide important insights into language vitality and language shift, in our language vitality assessment of Tutsa, we adopt the UNESCO Language Vitality and Endangerment framework (2003). This framework is adopted because of its comprehensive and multidimensional assessment of language vitality. It proposes nine evaluative factors for assessing the vitality of a language:

- Factor 1: Intergenerational Language Transmission
- Factor 2: Absolute Number of Speakers
- Factor 3: Proportion of Speakers within the Total Population
- Factor 4: Shifts in domains of Language use
- Factor 5: Response to New Domains and Media
- Factor 6: Availability of Materials for Language Education and Literacy
- Factor 7: Governmental and Institutional Language Attitudes and Policies, Including Official Status and Use
- Factor 8: Community Members' Attitudes toward Their Own Language
- Factor 9: Type and Quality of Documentation

These nine factors provide a comprehensive framework for assessing language vitality by considering demographic, functional, institutional, attitudinal, and documentary dimensions. Out of these nine factors, UNESCO identifies the first six factors (Factor 1 to Factor 6) as the major evaluative factors of language vitality. However, no single factor alone can be used in isolation to assess the vitality of a language and a comprehensive evaluation requires the consideration of all the nine factors.

Factor 1, Intergenerational Language Transmission, is one the most widely recognised indicators in evaluating the vitality of a language. It is incorporated into several frameworks including GIDS (Fishman, 1991), EGIDS (Lewis & Simons, 2010), and the Language Endangerment Index (Lee & Van Way, 2016). UNESCO distinguishes six degrees of endangerment with regard to Intergenerational Language Transmission: *Safe* (5) – with a sub-degree *Stable yet threatened* (5-), *Unsafe* (4), *Definitively endangered* (3), *Severely endangered* (2), *Critically endangered* (1), *Extinct* (0).

Factor 2 refers to the total number of individuals who speak a language, whereas Factor 3 considers the proportion of speakers in relation to the total population of the group. According to UNESCO (2003), this group may refer to the ethnic, religious, regional, or national group, depending on the identity with which the speech community associates itself. While Factor 2 measures the absolute size of the speaker population, Factor 3 assesses the relative strength of the language within the community with which its speakers identify.

Factor 4 examines shifts in domains of language use, including where the language is used, with whom it is used, and the range of topics for which it is employed. The extent to which a language continues to be used across different domains provides an indication of its potential for continued transmission to future generations.

Factor 5 examines response of a language to new domains and media. The extent to which a language is used in new domains such as formal education, broadcast media, new work environments, and the Internet provides an indication of its adaptability and vitality.

Factor 6 examines the availability of materials for language education and literacy, which is an essential component of language vitality. The existence of writing systems, literacy resources, and educational materials supports the use, maintenance and transmission of a language.

Factor 7 examines the governmental and institutional language attitudes and policies, including official status and use. This is necessary because linguistic policies can have a significant influence on how a community perceives and uses its language. Such policies can either encourage the minorities to maintain their language or encourage them to shift to a dominant language.

Factor 8 and Factor 9 examine community members' attitudes toward their own language and the amount and quality of language documentation, respectively (UNESCO, 2003). Positive community attitudes contribute to language maintenance, while comprehensive documentation supports the preservation and study of a language.

In the case of Tutsa, which is spoken in the highly multilingual setting of Arunachal Pradesh, the assessment of language vitality requires consideration of a range of demographic, functional, institutional, and attitudinal factors. This makes the UNESCO Language Vitality and Endangerment framework (UNESCO, 2003) particularly suitable for the present study, as it allows the vitality of the language to be examined within the broader multilingual context of Arunachal Pradesh.

3. Methodology

In view of the framework's multidimensional orientation, a multi-source research design was adopted, integrating quantitative survey data with demographic statistics, field observation, informal interviews, policy analysis, and secondary literature review. This triangulated design enables systematic operationalisation of all nine UNESCO factors.

In order to assess factors 1, 4, and 5, a bilingual questionnaire (English and Hindi) was administered both electronically (Google Forms) and in printed form. The survey was carried out between August and December 2024. Though 150 questionnaires were distributed, only 105 were retained for the analysis ($n = 105$). Of the excluded questionnaires, seven were incomplete, while 38 were not returned. Of the 105 respondents, 62 are male, while 43 are female. Almost 50% of the respondents (51 respondents) are below the age of 30, while 27 respondents are between 31 to 50 years, and another 27 respondents are above the age of 51. The respondents are from fifteen villages and two towns across Changlang and Tirap districts of Arunachal Pradesh, thereby ensuring wide geographic representation across the principal Tutsa-speaking region. Of the 105 respondents, 27 respondents are from urban areas, while the majority of 78 respondents are from rural areas. Given logistical constraints and the dispersed settlement pattern of the community, convenience sampling was employed; nevertheless, attention was paid to age variation among participants in order to facilitate assessment of intergenerational transmission, the central parameter in the UNESCO model.

The questionnaire elicited reported language use across twelve sociolinguistic domains encompassing family interaction (grandparents, parents, siblings), inter- and intra-community communication (relatives and friends within the tribe), religious practice, youth meetings, marketplace interaction, educational and occupational settings, and digital communication (social media). These domains were selected to operationalise key vitality indicators: family domains served as measures of intergenerational transmission (Factor 1); community and institutional contexts informed assessment of shifts in domains of language use (Factor 4); and digital communication provided evidence regarding response to new domains and media (Factor 5). Frequency of language use was measured through a five-point Likert scale (*Always, Often, Sometimes, Rarely, Never*). For analytical robustness, the categories *Always/Often* and *Rarely/Never* were consolidated, as *Often* and *Rarely* responses were consistently found to be small across domains and did not warrant independent statistical treatment. Data were coded and analysed using Microsoft Excel to generate percentage distributions, which were subsequently interpreted in relation to UNESCO vitality gradations. All percentages are rounded up to the nearest whole number.

Demographic parameters were derived from the last Government of India Census data (Census of India, 2011). Though the data is more than 15 years old, and hence a limitation to the study, this was the only reliable source for population figures. The absolute number of speakers (Factor 2) and the proportion of speakers within the broader district and state population (Factor 3) were calculated on the basis of officially reported figures. Evaluation of materials for language education and literacy (Factor 6) was conducted through field observation and interviews with community members and educators,

with attention to orthographic practices, availability of instructional materials, and patterns of literacy use. Governmental and institutional language attitudes and policies, including official status and use (Factor 7), were examined through analysis of relevant governmental documents and administrative provisions in Arunachal Pradesh. To assess the community members' attitudes toward their own language (Factor 8), interview data, participant observation during fieldwork, and reported patterns of language preference in the survey responses were examined. Finally, the type and quality of documentation (Factor 9) were evaluated by reviewing published descriptions, lexicographic works, scholarly publications, and other available documentary sources.

The assessment draws on survey data, census information, field observations, policy documents, and available language documentation to evaluate all nine UNESCO vitality factors. The following sections discuss each factor in relation to the Tutsa language.

4. Analysis

In this section, the nine vitality factors are assessed in detail, arriving at an appropriate grade for each factor.

4.1 Intergenerational Language Transmission (Factor 1)

In this section, the use of mother tongue in the home domain is presented along with the use of English, Hindi, and Assamese. The responses from the study show that the use of the mother tongue is dominant within the home domain.

The use of the mother tongue within the home domain is very healthy (Table 1), with almost all respondents using their mother tongue *Always* or *Often* with their father (99%), mother (97%), grandparents (98%), siblings (98%), and relatives (95%).

	<i>Always or Often</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Rarely or Never</i>
Father	99%	1%	0%
Mother	97%	2%	1%
Grandparents	98%	1%	1%
Siblings	98%	2%	0%
Relatives (within tribe)	95%	4%	1%

Table 1: Use of mother tongue in the home domain

While the use of English (E) and Assamese (A) *Always/Often* is negligible in the home domain, one should note that its use *Sometimes* is quite significant among siblings and relatives (Table 2). The use of English *Sometimes* is 24% among siblings and 14% with relatives from within the tribe. The use of Assamese *Sometimes* is also on the higher side with siblings (19%) and relatives (22%). Assamese is preferred more than English with relatives from outside the tribe, with 48% using it *Always/Often*.

	<i>Always or Often</i>		<i>Sometimes</i>		<i>Rarely or Never</i>	
	E	A	E	A	E	A
Father	4%	3%	8%	17%	88%	80%
Mother	1%	2%	3%	11%	96%	87%
Grandparents	0	2%	6%	7%	94%	91%
Siblings	6%	9%	24%	19%	70%	72%
Relatives (within tribe)	4%	8%	14%	22%	82%	70%
Relatives (outside tribe)	4%	48%	21%	13%	75%	39%

Table 2: Use of English and Assamese in the home domain

However, the use of Hindi is slightly more, and comes second in terms of usage after the mother tongue in the home domain. Except with grandparents, the usage of Hindi *Always or Often* is high. It is 12% with parents, 30% with siblings, and 20% (within tribe) and 70% (outside tribe) with relatives. The usage of Hindi with fathers (33%), mothers (25%), siblings (50%), and relatives (47% and 86%) shows a marked increase if the option *Sometimes* is included.

	<i>Always or Often</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Rarely or Never</i>
Father	12%	21%	67%
Mother	12%	13%	75%
Grandparents	2%	8%	90%
Siblings	30%	20%	50%
Relatives (within tribe)	20%	27%	53%
Relatives (outside tribe)	70%	16%	14%

Table 3: Use of Hindi in the home domain

Examining the home domain, it is evident that intergenerational transmission of the mother tongue is very strong. As a multilingual society, it is not surprising that other languages find a place in the home domain, with Hindi leading the other languages. Hence, while Tutsa is **Safe (Grade 5)** in terms of intergenerational transmission, we grade it **Stable yet threatened (5-)**, reflecting the increasing influence of the other languages in the home domain.

4.2 Absolute Number of Speakers (Factor 2)

The absolute number of Tutsa speakers is arrived at from the Census of India (2011) based on the C-16 tables (Population by Mother Tongue). In the census classification, Tutsa appears under the label ‘Tutcha Tangsa’ with mother tongue code 113024.

According to the census, 10,234 individuals reported ‘Tutcha Tangsa’ as their mother tongue at the all-India level. Out of the 10,234 speakers, 10,208 speakers are located in Arunachal Pradesh (state code: 12). This shows that almost the entire Tutsa-speaking population resides within the state.

According to district-wise census data, the largest concentration of Tutsa speakers is found in Changlang district (district code: 253) and Tirap district (district code: 254) of Arunachal Pradesh. Together, these two districts account for 10,082 speakers who reported ‘Tutcha Tangsa’ as their mother tongue. This distribution confirms that the Tutsa speech community remains geographically concentrated within a relatively small area of eastern Arunachal Pradesh.

Although the absolute number of speakers alone does not determine language vitality (UNESCO, 2003), relatively small speech populations may be more vulnerable to demographic fluctuations, migration, and language shift pressures. With just over ten thousand speakers, Tutsa represents a numerically limited linguistic community. Nevertheless, the strong geographic concentration of speakers within specific districts suggests a cohesive speech community whose vitality must be interpreted in conjunction with other sociolinguistic factors such as intergenerational transmission, domains of use, and community attitudes.

4.3 Proportion of Speakers within the Total Population (Factor 3)

The proportion of speakers within the total population of a group provides an important indicator of the demographic position of a language within its sociolinguistic environment. According to the UNESCO (2003) framework, the reference group for this factor may correspond to ‘the ethnic, religious, regional or national group with which the speaker community identifies.’

The choice of a reference group for this factor becomes a problem for two reasons. Firstly, if we are to consider the proportion of Tutsa speakers within the Tutsa speech community population, there is no separate census figure available for the Tutsa tribe. This is because the 2011 census considered Tutsa to belong to ‘Any Naga Tribe’. It was only in 2021 that Tutsa gained recognition as a separate tribe. Attempts to independently collect population figures from the community (village heads, All Tutsa Welfare Society) was also unsuccessful.

Secondly, if we are to consider the regional population in which the speech community is located in, this would be the combined population of Changlang and Tirap districts, the principal settlement areas of the Tutsa community. According to the Census of India (2011), a total of 10,082 Tutsa speakers reside within Changlang and Tirap districts, whose combined population is 260,223 (Changlang: 148,226; Tirap: 111,997). In addition, the census records 10,208 Tutsa speakers in Arunachal Pradesh. These figures allow comparison of the demographic proportion of Tutsa speakers at the district and state levels (Table 4).

Reference Population	Total Population	Tutsa Population	% Tutsa Population
Changlang & Tirap Districts	260,223	10,082	3.87%
Arunachal Pradesh	1,383,727	10,208	0.74%

Table 4: Proportion of Tutsa speakers at district and state level (Source: Census of India (2011), C-16 Population by Mother Tongue.)

As shown in Table 4, Tutsa speakers constitute approximately 3.87% of the total population of Changlang and Tirap districts, indicating that the language is spoken by a minority of the population even within its primary geographical area. The proportion becomes considerably smaller when compared with the population of Arunachal Pradesh (0.74%), reflecting the relatively limited demographic presence of the language within broader administrative contexts.

However, as rightly pointed out by a reviewer, these figures only show the minority status of Tutsa within the districts and state, and do not indicate that Tutsa is endangered within the Tutsa community. Although its relatively small proportional representation within the broader population indicates demographic vulnerability within the multilingual environment of the region, we believe that Factor 3 cannot be graded from the present study.

4.4 Shifts in Domains of Language Use (Factor 4)

This factor looks into the language use patterns in the community, examining where the language is spoken, with whom it is spoken, and the range of topics it is used for. This factor is considered to be important as language use patterns determine whether it will be transmitted to the next generation.

In this section, we look at language use in the informal domains (among friends, marketplace) and the formal domains (religious places, meetings).

In the informal domain (Table 5), we first examine language use among friends (only friends within the tribe are examined here). With friends, it is the mother tongue (91%) which is dominant. However, other languages also have a strong presence in this domain, with English (8%), Assamese (22%), and Hindi (42%) used *Always* or *Often*. If *Sometimes* is added, the numbers are much higher at 30% (English), 43% (Assamese), and 62% (Hindi). Clearly, it is Hindi which is the most used language after the mother tongue.

	<i>Always or Often</i>		<i>Sometimes</i>		<i>Rarely or Never</i>	
	Friends	Market	Friends	Market	Friends	Market
Mother tongue	91%	12%	3%	20%	6%	68%
English	8%	4%	22%	10%	70%	86%
Assamese	22%	51%	21%	19%	57%	30%
Hindi	42%	82%	20%	4%	38%	14%

Table 5: Language use among friends and in the market place

In the market (Table 5), the dominance of Hindi is evident with 82% of respondents using it *Always or Often*. Assamese is also quite frequent with 51% using it *Always or Often*. The use of the mother tongue is infrequent and declines to 12%. It is possible that the high usage of Hindi and Assamese is related to the dominance of non-locals in the market places.

In the informal domain, the dominance of the mother tongue is still observed when it involves people from the same tribe. However, we see the dominance of Hindi and Assamese when it involves communication with people from other tribes and communities. Even with friends from outside the tribe, Hindi (75%) and Assamese (48%) are spoken *Always or Often*. English, in this domain, has negligible presence, despite its status as the official language of the state, and also the medium of instruction in educational institutions.

In the formal domain (Table 6), we examine two areas: religious places and youth/union meetings. As the respondents belong to different religions, the religious places represent temples, churches, and traditional religious places.

	<i>Always or Often</i>		<i>Sometimes</i>		<i>Rarely or Never</i>	
	Religious places	Formal meetings	Religious places	Formal meetings	Religious places	Formal meetings
Mother tongue	77%	54%	9%	13%	14%	33%
English	10%	13%	20%	23%	70%	64%
Assamese	23%	29%	24%	18%	53%	53%
Hindi	46%	60%	21%	10%	33%	30%

Table 6: Language use in religious places and formal meeting

In religious places, the use of the mother tongue is still dominant at 77%, followed by the use of Hindi at 46%, Assamese (23%), and English (10%).

In formal meetings, the mother tongue use drops to 54%, while the use of Hindi becomes more prominent than the mother tongue at 60%. The increase in the use of Assamese and English is also visible at 29% and 13% respectively. If the option *Sometimes* is included, then the percentage of Assamese and English use increases to 47% and 36% respectively.

While the mother tongue is still dominant among friends and in religious places, languages like Hindi and Assamese seem to have become the dominant language in the other domains like market places and formal meetings. As will be seen in §4.5, Hindi and Assamese are dominant in schools and government offices as well. Hence, we grade Tutsa at **Multilingual parity (4)**, in which one or more dominant languages, are the primary languages in most official domains, though it remains integral to other domains, like religious places.

4.5 Response to New Domains and Media (Factor 5)

According to this factor, as the living conditions change, new domains for language use may emerge. The success of communities to expand language use into these new domains determine the stability of their languages. The new domains considered in this study include educational institutions, government offices, and social media. While the questionnaire did not include the domain of broadcast media (newspaper, television, radio, and YouTube channels), we also discuss this domain by examining various media platforms. The use of Tutsa in new domains and media remains limited, though some emerging patterns can be observed. The language is not used in formal mass media such as newspapers, television, or radio, and no dedicated media platforms operate in Tutsa.

In educational institutions and offices, we examine the use of language with teachers and government officials. In both domains, the use of the mother tongue is found to be negligible, while the use of Hindi is maximum at 73% (Institution) and 79% (Office). English is used by 32% of respondents with teachers and 15% in offices, while Assamese accounts for 28% and 35% in these two domains respectively.

	<i>Always or Often</i>		<i>Sometimes</i>		<i>Rarely or Never</i>	
	Institution	Office	Institution	Office	Institution	Office
Mother tongue	5%	4%	2%	8%	93%	87%
English	32%	15%	19%	25%	49%	60%
Assamese	28%	35%	19%	17%	53%	48%
Hindi	73%	79%	7%	2%	20%	19%

Table 7: Language use in educational institutions and offices

The above findings are supported by observations during interviews and discussions with members of the community, who claim that the medium of instruction in schools is mostly in Hindi, though textbooks are in English. The use of the mother tongue as the medium of instruction is not practical for two reasons. Firstly, most teachers are not from the same community and hence do not know the language. Secondly, the classroom is not homogenous, as students from different villages attend the same school. An encouraging development is the teaching of the mother tongue as a subject in Class 6, as a third language. However, it remains to be seen whether the teaching of the mother tongue will be extended to higher classes. The policy of the government to consider the mother tongue as a third language also needs rethinking as the mother tongue is the first language for a child, and teaching of it needs to begin earlier.

With the increase in the use of social media, we also ask respondents their preferred language while using messaging and posting on social media platforms. In social media as well, the use of mother tongue at 23% is not as high as English and Hindi, which are both at 48%. The use of Assamese stands lower at 9%. It is possible that the minimal usage of the mother tongue is linked to the nascent stage of development for the Tutsa script.

When it comes to media, Tutsa is present in audio-visual cultural media, particularly in songs and recorded performances available on platforms such as YouTube. A small number of videos also provide basic instruction in Tutsa orthography, where the language is used as the medium of explanation (see Appendix A for links to some of the content).

At the same time, its broader digital presence remains restricted. Although videos related to Tutsa culture are available online, they are typically presented in Hindi or English. Similarly, while some members of the Tutsa community are active as content creators on platforms such as YouTube,

they generally use Hindi or English rather than Tutsa in their content. This reflects the limited functional role of Tutsa in digital communication.

The concentration of Tutsa in culturally embedded media, such as songs, combined with its limited presence in broader communicative platforms, indicates an early stage of adaptation to new media domains.

According to the UNESCO (2003) framework for Factor 5, this situation corresponds to **Grade 1 (minimal)**, where the language is used in a few new domains but does not yet have a stable or widespread presence in modern media.

4.6 Availability of Materials for Language Education and Literacy (Factor 6)

The availability of written materials and literacy resources constitutes an important dimension of language vitality, as the presence of orthography, educational materials, and written texts contributes to the institutionalisation and intergenerational transmission of a language. In the case of Tutsa, literacy development reflects emerging initiatives toward written standardisation and educational integration, although the overall range of literacy materials remains limited.

The Tutsa community has adopted the Roman script as its orthographic medium, and efforts toward orthographic standardisation have been undertaken in recent years. A key milestone in this process is the publication of *Leewet Jatjootheing Thaakraang* (Tutsa Spelling Guide) (2nd ed., originally published 2015; revised 2016), developed following an Alphabet Development Workshop organised by the North-East Centre for Training and Research (NECTAR) in collaboration with the Tutsa Literacy Committee and *The Word for the World International*, a non-profit organisation. The guide establishes spelling conventions for the language and includes short narrative texts in Tutsa accompanied by English translations, thereby providing a foundational framework for written representation and early literacy development.

Institutional engagement with Tutsa literacy is further reflected in the publication of *Tutsa Jeng Tangphang*, a Class 6 textbook published by the State Council of Educational Research and Training (SCERT), Government of Arunachal Pradesh (First Edition, 2022). Although published by SCERT, 21 members of the All Tutsa Welfare Society were part of the editorial board. The development of this textbook through official state educational institutions represents an initial step toward integrating Tutsa into the formal education system. Field observations confirm that Tutsa is currently taught as a subject in Class 6 in several schools within the Tutsa-speaking region, including PM SHRI Government Secondary School, Laktong; Government Middle School, Wotlom; Government Secondary School, Yangkang; and Government Upper Primary School, Phangtip. The introduction of Tutsa in these schools indicates the beginning of formal literacy exposure within the educational domain, although instruction remains limited to a specific grade level and a broader sequence of graded teaching materials has not yet been established.

In addition to these educational resources, the New Testament of the Bible in Tutsa was published in 2018 using the adopted Roman script. This translation provides an extended body of written text and demonstrates the functional application of the orthographic system in religious contexts. Such materials contribute to the presence of written Tutsa beyond purely instructional settings and provide additional exposure to the written form of the language within the community.

Despite the availability of these written resources, field observations and interview responses suggest that awareness of Tutsa as a written language remains uneven among community members. Several respondents appeared to associate the Roman script primarily with English and expressed uncertainty regarding the existence of a distinct written form of Tutsa. This indicates that metalinguistic awareness of orthography and literacy practices has not yet become fully established across the community.

Taken together, these developments demonstrate the presence of orthographic standardisation, educational materials, translated texts, and limited school-based instruction in Tutsa. However, the overall range of literacy materials remains restricted, and literacy development has not yet been widely institutionalised through the education system or supported by broader print or media dissemination.

According to the UNESCO (2003) framework for Factor 6: Availability of Materials for Language Education and Literacy, these conditions correspond most closely to **Grade 3**, where written materials exist and children are exposed to the written form of the language in school, but literacy development remains limited and not yet fully integrated into the broader educational system.

4.7 Governmental and Institutional Language Attitudes and Policies, Including Official Status and Use (Factor 7)

Factor 7 of the UNESCO framework evaluates the governmental and institutional language attitudes and policies, including official status and use. From the perspective of assessing the vitality of the language, factor 7 plays a crucial role, as language policies can have varying impacts on how a community perceives and uses its language.

Relevant national frameworks in the Indian context include the Official Languages Act (Government of India, 1963), the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution of India (Government of India, 1950), and the National Education Policy (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2020). However, in this section, we limit our assessment to the language policies currently in operation in the state of Arunachal Pradesh. We also examine the initiatives undertaken by the state government to promote or safeguard indigenous languages, especially Tutsa.

The Tutsa community has received official recognition through the Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order (Amendment) Act, 2021 (Government of India, 2021), which amends the list of Scheduled Tribes for the state of Arunachal Pradesh. Along with Tutsa, the amended list also explicitly included Wancho, Nocte, and Tangsa, and this amendment was published in the Gazette of India (Extraordinary, Part II, Section 1) on 13 August, 2021 (Government of India, 2021). Although this recognition is primarily socio-political and doesn't directly address the language, it does lay an institutional foundation for cultural preservation and educational activities targeted at the Tutsa people.

In Arunachal Pradesh, language use in education is regulated by the Arunachal Pradesh Education Act, 2010. The Act emphasises the development of linguistic skills in regional and local languages. It further acknowledges the role of education in the preservation of cultural heritage and traditions. However, the Act does not specify any indigenous language as a medium of instruction in schools. Indigenous languages are generally taught as third-language subjects and are rarely used as media of instruction. English continues to be the major language of instruction across schools, while Hindi also occupies a prominent position and is widely taught as a second language.

The Arunachal Times (2024, March 8) reports that the Government of Arunachal Pradesh has recognised the languages and dialects of 23 constitutionally recognised indigenous tribes as third languages in the educational framework of the state. Another report by *The Sentinel* (2025, August 22) provides evidence of implementation. It reports that the State Council of Educational Research and Training (SCERT), Itanagar, organised a teacher training programme on promoting multilingual education in line with the objectives of NEP 2020. The training was organised in seventeen batches between May 9 and August 22, 2025, with each batch undergoing five days of training. It included 696 teachers from across the state. The report further noted that the training aimed to equip teachers with the pedagogical skills necessary to introduce indigenous languages in classrooms. Fourteen indigenous languages, including Tutsa, were included in the programme.

However, despite recent steps taken by the state government to support indigenous languages, these efforts are not sufficient, as no indigenous language, including Tutsa, plays any role in governance or administration. English and Hindi are used in public institutions for official purposes. Nevertheless,

there is no evidence of policies aimed at suppressing the Tutsa language, and the language receives a modest level of institutional support through educational programmes. Therefore, under UNESCO's (2003) Factor 7, this situation is best classified as **Grade 3** (Passive Assimilation).

4.8 Community Members' Attitudes toward Their Own Language (Factor 8)

Information on community members' attitudes toward Tutsa was obtained using semi-structured interviews, participant observation during fieldwork, and survey responses relating to language preference. The analysis focused on expressions of linguistic pride, perceived cultural importance of the language, willingness to transmit Tutsa to younger generations, and community perceptions regarding its role in education, social interaction, and public life.

It is important to recognise that attitudinal data derived from interviews and self-report surveys may be influenced by social desirability bias, particularly when responses are elicited by an external researcher. Participants may express strong support for the language as an affirmation of community identity in the interview setting. To address this potential limitation, reported attitudes were interpreted alongside observed patterns of language use across social domains, which provided an additional indicator of the community's orientation toward the language.

Interview responses and participant observation indicate that Tutsa continues to hold strong value within the community. It is observed that most of the participants associate the language with ethnic identity, cultural continuity, and collective belonging. Speakers frequently emphasised the importance of maintaining Tutsa as a marker of community heritage, and there was a general sense of pride attached to its use. The survey findings further show that Tutsa is widely used in home and community settings, indicating its continued importance in everyday communication.

However, participants also acknowledged the importance of Hindi and English in domains related to education, employment, and wider opportunities beyond the community. This does not generally lead to negative attitudes toward Tutsa. Rather, the language is viewed as culturally significant within the community, while Hindi and English are regarded as functionally necessary in wider social and administrative contexts.

Overall, the findings suggest that community members' attitudes toward Tutsa remain broadly positive. Speakers express pride in the language and recognise its cultural significance, even though they simultaneously acknowledge the practical advantages of dominant regional and national languages in certain domains. According to the UNESCO (2003) framework for Factor 8: Community members' attitudes toward their own language, these findings correspond most closely to **Grade 4**, where most members of the community support language maintenance. The coexistence of positive attitudes toward Tutsa and pragmatic reliance on dominant languages reflects the multilingual sociolinguistic environment in which the speech community operates.

4.9 Type and Quality of Documentation (Factor 9)

Factor 9 evaluates the type and quality of documentation available for Tutsa. In recent years, there have been increasing efforts by researchers to document the language. However, the available documentation is still limited. Although several linguistic studies exist, a comprehensive account of the language is not yet available.

The Tutsa Language Guide (Rekhung, 1992), published by the Directorate of Research, Government of Arunachal Pradesh, is one of the earliest studies on Tutsa. It is preliminary in nature and provides some introductory descriptive information on the language. Konch's (2021a) Ph.D. dissertation, *টুটসা ভাষাৰ গঠনাত্মক বিশ্লেষণ* [*A Structural Analysis of the Tutsa Language*], represents an important contribution to the documentation of Tutsa and describes several structural features of the language. Konch's (2021b) study contributes to the understanding of nominal inflection in Tutsa.

More recent research includes Gogoi's (2025) Ph.D. dissertation, *A Phonological and Morphological Study of Tutsa*, which provides a description of the phonology, morphology, and sociolinguistic profile of the language. In addition, Sudhakaran's (2026) Ph.D. dissertation, *Cognitive Tutsa Grammar*, examines the language from a cognitive linguistic perspective.

Thus, the available materials include descriptive studies and texts that provide information on certain aspects of the language. However, the existing documentation does not cover the language in sufficient detail, and a comprehensive reference grammar, dictionary, and extensive archived recordings are still lacking. On this basis, Tutsa is classified as **Grade 2** (Fragmentary documentation) under UNESCO Factor 9.

5. Conclusion

In the above sections, we have assessed the vitality of Tutsa against the nine factors laid down in the UNESCO *Language Vitality and Endangerment* framework (2003). Though most of the factors are graded in this framework, it avoids an overall grading as it claims that 'languages cannot be assessed simply by adding the numbers.' Hence, an overall grading is not attempted in this study. The gradings for the nine factors are summarised in Table 8.

Factors	Assigned Grade	Description
Factor 1: Intergenerational Language Transmission	Stable yet threatened (5-)	The language is spoken in most contexts by all generations with unbroken intergenerational transmission, yet multilingualism in the native language and one or more dominant language(s) has usurped certain important communication contexts.
Factor 2: Absolute Number of Speakers	-	-
Factor 3: Proportion of Speakers within the Total Population	Not graded	Lack of data
Factor 4: Shifts in domains of Language use	Multilingual parity (Grade 4)	Two or more languages may be used in most social domains and for most functions.
Factor 5: Response to New Domains and Media	Minimal (Grade 1)	The language is used only in a few new domains.
Factor 6: Availability of Materials for Language Education and Literacy	Grade 3	Written materials exist and children may be exposed to the written form at school. Literacy is not promoted through print media.
Factor 7: Governmental and Institutional Language Attitudes and Policies, Including Official Status and Use	Passive Assimilation (Grade 3)	No explicit policy exists for minority languages; the dominant language prevails in the public domain.
Factor 8: Community Members' Attitudes toward Their Own Language	Grade 4	<i>Most</i> members support language maintenance.
Factor 9: Type and Quality of Documentation	Fragmentary (Grade 2)	There are some grammatical sketches, word-lists and texts useful for limited linguistic research but with inadequate coverage. Audio and video recordings of varying quality, with or without any annotation, may exist.

Table 8: Summary of factors assessed

Factor 2, which assesses the absolute number of speakers, is not graded in the UNESCO framework. However, if we are to consider the *LEI* scale (Lee & van Way 2016) for this factor, the Tutsa population of 10,082 borders between *Threatened* (1000-9999) and *Vulnerable* (10,000-99,999).

As the intergenerational transmission of the language is very high, the Tutsa language may be considered safe. We also see that most members of the community have a very positive attitude towards the language and supports its maintenance.

However, its small population coupled with the dominance of official languages like English and Hindi in almost all domains, exposes its vulnerability to further endangerment. An evaluation of the other factors also tells us that Tutsa is struggling to cope with emerging new domains, the production of language materials, and documentation of the language. In new domains, it is mostly the dominant languages which are used due to the multicultural and multilingual makeup of the society, and the amount of language materials are at best meagre.

In order to safeguard Tutsa from further endangerment, one major area which needs focus is mother tongue education. While existing government policies recognise and allow for the teaching of Tutsa (and many other tribal languages), the pace at which this has been implemented is appalling. Though the Class 6 textbook was published in 2022, no further publications are reported for the higher classes. The government must also reconsider the teaching of the mother tongue as a subject from Class 6, making it mandatory for minority languages to be taught right from Class 1. We consider this to be important as equipping the younger generation to read and write in their languages would help in extending mother tongue usage to other domains like institutions and different media platforms. It is only when such steps are taken that lost domains can be recovered.

As a community, the widespread usage of the proposed script and spelling conventions must also be encouraged among members, creating awareness on the importance of preserving and maintaining their mother tongue. As Valiquette (1998) rightly says, “The community, and only the community, can preserve a living language. If the community surrenders its responsibility to outsiders, or even to a few persons within the community (such as school teachers), the language will die. Language preservation efforts must involve the total community, and not just a part of it” (p. 107).

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Appendix A

Selected digital media content relevant to the use of Tutsa in new domains.

1. Instructional Content (Language Use in Tutsa)

- Tutsa. (2025, October 22). *Tutsa language word formation* [Video]. YouTube.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W7pb1NrGFzg>
- Tutsa. (2025, October 17). *Tutsa language: Jengkadang (consonants) and Kawaan (vowels)* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lk94zVIZls4>

2. Cultural Media (Limited Use of Tutsa)

- DD Arunprabha. (2025, May 23). *Arunachali thali | Episode: Tutsa thali* [Video]. YouTube.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4O3fXfHkw0U>
- (Cultural programme featuring the Tutsa community; narration is primarily in a dominant language rather than Tutsa.)

3. Audio-Visual Cultural Content (Active Use of Tutsa)

- Techa Lowang. (2019, October 31). *Thun thang ba (Jenlana)* [Video]. YouTube.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=35upn6fJnMA>
- Techa Lowang. (2022, March 16). *Jenlana (official audio)* [Video]. YouTube.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RU00A6Z-gwA>
- L. K. Tutsa. (2023, April 10). *Tutsa pongtu kuh (lyrics & karaoke)* [Video]. YouTube.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mhlmwG1doKU>