INTERGENERATIONAL LANGUAGE USE AND ATTITUDE: A STUDY AMONG TAMIL BRAHMINS IN TRIVANDRUM

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Abstract

'Intergenerational language use and attitude' refers to the way different generations within a language group take a stand towards their heritage language (HL). Immigrant families are one of the domains in which heritage language and culture are preserved and transferred to the younger generation in a different geo-political and socio-cultural context. Often, they face particular issues and challenges in supporting the intergenerational transmission of their heritage language, especially when the speech involved does not have high visibility and status in the surrounding society. This study aims to analyse the Tamil Brahmin community's intergenerational language use and attitude in the Trivandrum district of Kerala. Variety of Tamil is the heritage language (HL) of the community and is in strong contact with Malayalam, which is the language of wider communication (LWC) in the state. The data for the study has been collected using an ethnographic research method. And, the study employed a qualitative analysis approach resorting to the ethnolinguistic vitality perception framework for analytical purposes. It is evident from the study that there is a difference in language use and attitudes in this community over generations.

***Keywords:** intergenerational language use, attitude, aging, language, ethnolinguistic vitality, tamil Brahmin, kerala, language, wider community.*

Introduction

'Intergenerational language use and attitude' refers to the way different generations within a language group take a stand towards their heritage language (HL). When people migrate, they often carry their culture and language. Immigrant families are one of the domains in which heritage language and culture are preserved and transferred to the younger generation in a different geo-political and socio-cultural context. The preservation of linguistic and cultural traits in the new environment reflects the intensity of maintaining the ethnic

identities of individuals. This leads to self-separation from engaging in the host land's culture or language. Separation occurs when individuals reject the dominant or host culture in favour of preserving their culture of origin. Separation is often facilitated by immigration to ethnic enclaves (Berry, 1992). Ethnic enclaves are an outward manifestation of groups feeling superior to others. However, it is very difficult for immigrant groups to break away from the dominant cultural patterns. Hence, they integrate (Berry, ibid) with the mainstream language and culture. In this context, often, they face particular issues and challenges in supporting the intergenerational transmission of their heritage language, especially when the speech involved does not have high visibility and status in the surrounding society.

Studies on Immigrant Groups and Language

Several studies have been conducted in sociolinguistic studies of heritage languages in a contact situation. Also, describe the concepts of heritage and minority language, language maintenance, shift, attitude, identity, etc. Previous studies have shown that children from different social classes and cultural backgrounds have equal ability to successfully acquire their native Language (MacSwan, 2000; Rolstad, 2015). However, in the case of immigrants' children, namely heritage language speakers, may not be able to achieve full command of their family/ heritage language and the same language and literacy proficiency as their parents and peers raised in their home countries due to restricted access to HL in limited contexts during the age of primary linguistic development (Montrul, 2010). Qiong Xia (2016) studied the aspects of heritage language Chinese immigrant families in the southwest of the US. The study intended to explore the language practices and patterns among family members, language and literacy environment at home, parents' language management, parents' language attitudes and ideologies, and biliteracy practices. The study has found that language practices and patterns at home show a trend of language shift among Chinese immigrants' children. Holmes (2001) points out that a positive attitude inspired the speakers of the minority language to use their Language in

various domains, which helped slow the shift to the primary stream language. Holmes (1993) and Baker (1992) illustrate the importance of language attitude in shifting or maintaining the Language.

Aim & Significance

This study aims to analyse the language use and attitude of people belonging to different generations among the Tamil Brahmins in the Trivandrum district of Kerala. The heritage language of the ethnic group is a variety of Tamil, which is characterised by several peculiar grammatical and lexical features. However, less attention is drawn to the aspects of the sociolinguistic behaviour of the targeted group. Therefore, the present study tries to fill the gap by identifying how language behaviour, especially its use and attitude, is shaped over generations. Additionally, the study attempts to determine whether the community's sociolinguistic tendencies are indicative of progressive additive bilingualism or regressive subtractive bilingualism strategies based on their choice-making in the code selections.

Methodology

The study approached the matter of discussion qualitatively. An ethnographic field research method was employed for the data collection procedures. Participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and casual conversation methods were used to accumulate data from the community consultants. Three Brahmin settlements were selected for data collection purposes. 1) Krishnapuram Gramam, Neyyattinkara, 2) Deepam Street, Karamana, 3) Sree Varaham, Attukal, Trivandrum. The major tools used for the field research were a questionnaire, an observation field note, and an audio-visual recorder. The target research samples of this study were categorized into three sections grandparental generations, parental generations, and youngsters. A total of 60 participants were consulted with the questionnaire, and more were observed in their natural community settings. The data is explanatorily analysed in light of the ethnolinguistic vitality (EV) theory (Giles. H, 1978).

Target Group

Tamil Brahmins in Kerala, also known as Kerala Iyers or Bhattar, are

residents of the Kerala region. Historically, they migrated from present-day Tamilnadu in different waves from the time of the Chera dynasty. Tamil Brahmins who came from Tanjore, Trichy, Vaitheeswaram Koil, and other areas established many agraharams in different Southern regions, including some parts of Travancore regions, that's today's Trivandrum District. Even today, they use a variety of Tamil, which is, indeed, a regional-based sociolect. The community enjoyed the status of religious priesthood in society and performed temple activities. People in the group believed their hierarchical superiority over other ethnic castes and other groups in society conceded their privilege of high caste as well. The Tamil Brahmins are vegetarians. Moreover, their customs and practices are all totally different from others.

Data Analysis & Discussion

As the study delved into the pattern of heritage language use in various domains of intracommunity interactions, the study found a significant variation in the domain of language use of people who belong to different generations from their conversational patterns and opinions.

Grand Parental Generation

The grandparents were bilinguals capable of using the heritage language and the LWC. In order to identify what language, they speak to people in their age group and their descendants (parental generation & youngsters), the study has made a close observation and asked them directly to validate their opinions.

"ʈamiɻə eŋka bʱaːʂajaːkkum aʈə peːʃaɾaʈə ʈaːn enakkə sau̯arjam''
(Tamil is our Language, and I can speak it without any hesitation)
-Lalithammal- (88 yrs old, female, 3rd)

The following piece of speech was extracted from the natural conversations between the grandparental Generation and others.

Example-1 (at the market)

Lalithammal: siːʈaːaŋke ɟoːli ellaːm ʈiːɳʈaːcca (Sita, all your works are over)

Seetha : ʈiːɳʈaːccu ʈara ʈoʈaccə poːʈʈəirikkeːn Ippo iŋke ʋaraːʈe (Yes finished, don't come inside,

because I just cleaned the floor)

Lalithammal : appaʈija: ʃeɾi (Oh, okay)

Seetha : eṉṉe:m ʋe:ɳama: (do you want anything?)

Lalithammal : ʋe:ɳʈa (no)

*Lalithammal- (88 yrs old, female, 3rd)
*Seetha (daughter-in-law of Lalithammal)- (40 yrs old, female, pre-degree)

The above-extracted conversations indicate the grandparental Generation commonly uses Tamil with everyone in the intra-community dialogues. It reveals the pattern of language use of people of the grandparental Generation. It also substantiates that they have a very positive attitude towards their HL so they use it with people in other generation groups even in the outside domain as well. Moreover, it is reported that their caste feeling is also very stronger than their younger counterparts.

Parental Generation

The data obtained from the interview suggests that the parental Generation uses a mixed form of Tamil and Malayalam. The use of Language by the parental Generation shows variation across generations within the communities. The following conversation between the consultants who belong to the parental generations and others offers a picture of the choice of Language that they tend to use.

Example- 2 (at home)

Sudha : amma: ʃa:ḍam pooʈʈa:ccə (Mom lunch is ready)

Lekshmi Ammal : enakkə ippo ʋe:ɳʈa: paʃikkalajə (I am not hungry now)

Sudha : ṉe:ɾama:ja:cce: ʋaṉʈə ca:piʈuŋko (it is already lunchtime, please have your food)

Lekshmi Ammal : ʋe:ɳʈa suḏ̥ʰa enakkə kaɻijalajə (No Sudha, I am feeling not well)

Sudha : eṉṉa:ccə ṉa:ɭekkə ʋe:ɳama:na: blaḍ ʈesṯ̱ṯ paɳɳipa:kkala:m (What happened? Tomorrow will do a blood test if required)

*Sudha – (daughter of Lekshmi Ammal, 43 yrs, Female, 10th)
*Lekshmi Ammal – (78 yrs, Female, 1st)

Example-3 (outside the house)

Ramaswamy Iyer :iṉṯa kuʈʈikkə eṉṉajum kaɻikkakoʈuṯṯaja eṉṯeŋkilum ʋa:ŋŋaṇo:? (Did you give her anything to eat, should I buy something)

Meenakshi Ammal :ɟju:s koʈuṯṯu ṉiŋŋaɭ po:jiʈʈə ʋarumpam eṉṉajum ʋa:ŋki:ʈʈə ʋa:(I gave her juice, you buy something when you come back)

Ramaswamy Iyer – (53 yrs, Male, Graduate)
Meenakshi Ammal – (wife of Ramaswamy Iyer, 49 yrs, Female, pre-degree)

By analysing these conversation extractions, the remarks developed was that the parental generation switches codes. The participants said that they prefer to use Tamil with their parents and often switch to Malayalam while addressing their children. And They reported that they tend to use Tamil when they discuss religious or family matters.

Younger Generation

The following pieces of conversation are between youngsters and other generation groups.

Example-4 (at home)

Saraswathy Ammal :empuʈʈə ṇe:rama: ʈu:ŋki:ʈʈə irikke eṉʈiɾ (woke up, you have been sleeping for a long)

Nithya   : eṉṉa ʋe:ṇam pa:ʈʈiṇa:n koɲcam ʈu:ŋkaʈʈum (What do you want grandma? Let me sleep a bit)

Saraswathy Ammal:e:jṉṯirṉṯə ʋaṉṯə ka:ppi kuʈi (get up and have some coffee)

Nithya   : ṇa:n ʋare:n pa:ʈʈi ṉi:ŋka po:ŋko: (you go, I will come)

Saraswathy Ammal – (grandmother of Nithya, 86 yrs, Female, 2nd)
Nithya – (25 yrs, Female, Post Graduate)

Example-5 (at home)

Meera: amma: iṉṉə kaʈajil po:ɳa:enikkə kuraccə sa:ḏʰanam ʋa:ŋŋa:nuɳʈə (Mom, are you going to shop? I want to buy something)

Mother : ɲa:n iṉṉə po:ɳilla ṉi: ʋe:ɳo:ŋki appe:ɾe:ʈuʈṯə co:ḏiʧʧiʈʈə po: (I am not going today if you want to go, get permission from your father)

Meera (to father): appa:enakkəkoɲcam sa:nam ʋa:ŋkaɳam ṉa:n kaʈajkkə po:ʈʈuma: (Dad, may I go to the shop to buy something)

Father : sa:jaŋka:lam a:ja:cce: ṉa:ɭe:kkəpo:na: po:ɾum (Its late today, you may go Tomorrow)

Meera – (25 yrs, Female, B.Tech)
Father – (53, 10th)
Mother – (49, 10th)

Example-6

Manikanfdan: eʈi iʋiʈe iruṉṉa enʈe bukk ka:ɳa:nilla ṉi: kaɳʈa: (Hey, did you see my book. It was here)

Dhanya : ɲa:n oṉṉum kaɳʈilla (I didn't see)

Manikandan : ṉi: oṉṉə ṉo:kkiʈa: (Can I search it for me)

Manikandan – (26 yrs, Male, B.Tech)
Dhanya – (Sister of Manikandan, 23 yrs, Female)

The above extractions from the conversations indicate that the younger Generation predominantly uses Malayalam. And they use Tamil depending on the interlocutors in the limited domains. Because of their grandparent's compulsion, they use Tamil with them. They are taught to use Tamil to show respect by their grandparents. The study also reveals the extent of code-mixing and code-switching among the Tamil Brahmins in Kerala. The speech of the grandparental, parents, and youngsters is marked by code-mixing.

Overview of Language Use

In this section, the study presents the finding from people's responses to what language they prefer to use with their same generation group and other generations inside and outside domains. The following table better

illustrates the pattern of language use by three generations in both inside (home and community) and outside (outside the community) domains.

	Grand-Parental Gen		Parental Gen		Youngster-Gen	
	Inside	Outside	Inside	Outside	Inside	Outside
Grand-Parent Gen	HL	HL	HL	HL	HL	HL
Parent Gen	HL	HL & LWC	HL & LWC	LWC & HL	LWC & HL	LWC
Young Gen	HL & LWC	LWC & HL	LWC & HL	LWC	LWC	LWC

The table shows that the grandparental generation prefers their HL in all the possible domains and, moreover, they reported that they are voluntarily willing to use Malayalam only with outsiders. They also compel their following generations to use their HL for all kinds of intra-community interactions. The parental generation balances between HL and LWC. It implies that they tend to switch and mix between LWC and HL. Furthermore, they are found to use the LWC mostly with their children. And, even the youngsters in the community are primarily bilinguals. They can understand and speak the HL, but they limit the number of domains in which they use their HL. It shows that there is a trend change in the pattern of language use across the generations in the community. It is interpreted from their behaviour that the more they practice cultural separation the more preserve the use of their language in maximum domains. Unlike the grandparental and parental generations, the younger generation becomes socially more active and expands their friend circle with outsiders more than ever before.

Ethnolinguistic Vitality Status of Tamil Brahmin Community

This section discusses the concept of EV and some of its components used to measure the linguistic vitality of the Tamil Brahmin community. Language vitality is demonstrated by the extent that the Language is used as means of communication in various social contexts for specific purposes. All generations will use a language with high vitality, both inside and outside the home, and for most, if not all, topics. Hence, measuring the vitality status of a language through the perspective of intergeneration language usage patterns is indeed

ethnolinguistically vital. Expanded Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (EGIDS) is the common tool for intergenerational language transmission processes and vitality concerns. The concept of EV helps the linguistic community to identify the relevance to language maintenance, shift or loss. The concept of ethnolinguistic vitality was developed from Tajfel's intergroup relations theory and Giles's speech accommodation model (Bitchani). The following are the variables used to investigate the EV status.

Variables

The vitality of ethnolinguistic groups is made by combining the factors such as status, demography, and institutional support among these, the level indicates the economic and social status of the group. The variable demography denotes the number of populations in the community. Institutional variable refers to the organisation that encourages its community. The strength and weaknesses of the group can be checked and provide a classification of the group as having low, medium, or high vitality.

Status

The status variable includes the economic, social, and Language status of a group within or outside the community. Financial status refers to whether they are economically strong compared to others (Giles, 1977). There is no unified economic status for this community. Usually, people have different economic statuses. Social status is concerned with the hierarchal caste system that is prevalent. In the hierarchal caste system, the Brahmins belong to the top position. So, the group that the study is dealing with is one among the Brahmin community i.e., Tamil – Brahmins. Language status is concerned with the language's linguistic status compared to those belonging to the subgroups of the Brahmin community. They are Malayalam speakers. So, they can be considered socially and linguistically a high class. But the Tamil – Brahmins are socially high class and linguistically minors in society.

Demography

Demographic factors include the number of settlements, birth rate, intergroup marriage, immigration patterns, and migration into and out of

the settlement (Bourhis and Sachdev, 1984; Yagmur 2011).

Average Siblings Format

The study has found that the population deduction occurs from the grandparental Generation to the younger generation due to family planning over Generations. Thus, when the number of populations decreases, the use of Tamil by their community members will also decrease.

Intergroup Marriage

Marriage has a vital role in culture and Language change. Thus, inter-caste marriage led to the language change of many offspring generations. Here, inter-caste marriage indicates the marriage between a Tamil-Brahmin person and a person from a different ethnic community. There exist two languages between them. So, when a Tamil Brahmin girl or boy marries an outside community member, their offspring acquire the LWC.

Migration

Migration is one of the demographic factors that led to the reduction of populations among the Tamil Brahmins settlement. There are approximately about 4 agraharams in

Thiruvananthapuram. Formerly, only Tamil Brahmins lived in these agraharams. But nowadays, because of the process of migration, the number of populations in their settlement has begun to reduce. For instance, Krishnapuram Gramam Neyyattinkara witnessed the inflections of other castes like Nairs, Ezhavas, and even Christians. There are about 50 houses; among these, only 25 families belong to Tamil Brahmins, and the rest of them belongs to the outside community. Because of marriage, job purposes, and several other reasons led to their migration. Likewise, in Karamana agraharam there are about 30 houses. Among those, only 16 families belong to Tamil Brahmins, and others are non-Brahmins.

Immigration

Immigration has a role in the development of a multicultural society. There are two ways that led to the immigration process, such as giving houses for rent and buying properties. This led to their contact with the outside community. So, these factors indicate that the community space is getting reduced, and shows that the EV of Tamil Brahmins is getting

decreased. It is not stable as it was in the previous generations. The reduction in population will affect the use of their language also.

Institution

The Tamil-Brahmin community in Kerala has formed a caste organization, which is named Kerala Brahmin Sabha (KBS). The KBS Vanitha vibhagom (women's wing) and Yuvajan vibhogam (youth wing) are the major subgroups. It is mainly developed for the educational improvement of the community. But it doesn't give any considerable importance to the maintenance of their heritage language.

Media

Media has an important role in the use of Language, as it increases individuals' exposure to the Language, and may influence their attitudes toward it (Bichani,2015). Some of the grandparental Generation use Tamil for watching informative channels. But when it comes to parental and the younger Generation, they prefer only Malayalam for informative channels. But they watch movies in both Tamil and Malayalam.

Conclusion

This study was to explore the patterns of language use and attitudes of the members of the Tamil – Brahmin community in Kerala. The community in question is a minority group that is placed at the top of the social hierarchy. However, their sociolinguistic behaviour was quite unknown to a certain extent. Analytical explanations of the present study will provide some vital information about the language use, practice, and attitude of the community, especially through a cross–generational investigation. The grandparental Generation has a very strong community feeling, but over the Generation, the attitude towards the Language is turning differently than the previous Generation. The results show that Tamil is in vigorous use by the grandparental Generation in most domains within the community. They are the most important factor in the maintenance of the language because when people are getting old or become a grandparental generation, they are feeling insecure about their community. Because of this insecurity feeling, they are using their Language in all the domains as well as they are

insisting to other community members use their Language. But for the younger Generation, Tamil is the least preferred Language, with grandparents being the only interlocutors with whom young people used the Language the most. However, as of now, all the community members, except for a few, acquire, learn and use the heritage language at least in the limited domains (i.e., home domain, community domain) due to some internal compulsive factors. Even the youngsters can understand and speak in the heritage language, but they limit the number of domains of speech. This is a sufficient indicator of language maintenance. Despite the presence of some powerful community associations, the community does not have institutional support to sustain their Language. Hence the Language is used for face–to–face communication within all generations. Even though the youths have the tendency to reduce the usage of Language to a limited number of domains, the feeling of being socially excluded due to their high ranking in social stratification is immersed in the mind of the older Generation. So, they change their feelings towards their identity while stepping into the old age period. More study is required to identify the impact of modern education and occupational pattern change in the reshaping language behaviour of the community.

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