A SOCIAL PARAMETERS OF DALIT DIALECT IN MAYILADUTHURAI DISTRICT OF TAMIL NADU

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Introduction

The correlation between linguistic variables and social parameters is the prime focus of sociolinguistics that is, the main theme of research is the variations that are found to occur in language are explained based on changes in the structure of the language and what social identity or variable is responsible or characteristic to that particular variation. This is because language is a social phenomenon and it has been acknowledged that language use reflects social structures and parameters. In this regard, sociolinguistic investigations have so far revealed numerous styles and variations that exist in various social contexts situations, environments, etc. Individuals differ from one another and this is also reflected in their language behaviour as well as use. Based on these notions, different social groups are identified based on some parameters which are termed social variables, such as those listed below:

1. Religion

2. Age

3. Sex

4. Region

5. Income

6. Caste, and

7. Education

Based on social stratification and also depending on other social characteristics, the linguistic behaviour influenced by each of these variables can be studied as it is reflected in day-to-day language. These variations are found to occur in different speech communities and can be studied systematically when they are approached individually so that they can be compared with each other. Then, the variations can be correlated with the social parameters.

For the present investigation, the social variable chosen for inquiry is *education*. The reason behind this is that education plays a major role in influencing the social flow of the study population, namely, the Adi-Dravidars community living in the rural regions of the Sirkali Taluk. Apart from this, other social variables that primarily seem to be influential in the study population include religion, income, and age. The present study is restricted to the following social parameters.

Religion: Hindu
Gender: Male and Female
Age: Old age group (above 50 years)
Caste: Adi-Dravida community
Region: Sirkali taluk–rural regions
Income: Medium income

These social parameters were constant among the study population, and the social variable considered for this investigation was "education." Therefore, two groups of the study population were chosen for the study, namely, (i) educated and (ii) uneducated group.

Thus, the independent and dependent variables are as follows:
Independent variable: educated and uneducated
Dependent variable: linguistic variables

Social variables
In this section, the above-mentioned social variables are described in the context of the Tamil society.
1. Religion
The major religions followed by the people of Tamil Nadu are Hinduism, Christianity, and Islam. According to the 2011 Census data, the percentages of these religions in Tamil Nadu are as follows: 87.6% Hinduism, 6.1% Christianity, and 5.9% Islam. This stratification is not that simple because these groups even identify themselves with labels beyond categories that can be considered to be purely made based on religion. That is, Hindus further identify themselves based on numerous castes. In this view, caste cannot be excluded from the concept of religion

because it seems to be interwoven in the case of most castes in Tamil society. For instance, as far as the Hindu community is concerned, the prime deity worshipped by a community varies by caste; for example, the people of the Iyer and Iyengar castes worship "Shiva" and "Vishnu" as their prime deity. However, these labels are not treated as religious labels, but as caste names. Thus, this emphasizes the relationship between caste and religion. Similarly, based on their mother tongue, Muslims in Tamil Nadu identify themselves as either Tamil Muslims or Urdu Muslims. Hence, in the social situation of Tamil Nadu, religion is not just a one-dimensional social variable and a variety of variables are involved. This complicates the speech varieties of these communities because each of these communities has its speech variety with characteristic linguistic variations. This situation is not different in the case of Christians of Tamil Nadu. They also seem to identify themselves with one caste or the other. But certain caste–religion combinations are more common than others, for example, Christian (religion)–Nadar (caste). The reason behind this can be found only by historical and explorative research. However, one can assume that there might be some historical as well as political reasons behind this phenomenon. In light of these complexities, one cannot separate religion from the variable of caste while studying any social group based on either caste or religion in the Tamil or even the Indian context. In addition, language also seems to be closely related to religion in some cases, such as in the example of Tamil Muslims and Urdu Muslims.

2. Gender

Gender is one of the important social variables. This statement can be substantiated if we establish how different the genders are from each other in a given society in terms of their roles and activities in society. In a society in which men and women are traditionally or stereotypically assumed to be associated with certain occupations, social roles, and behaviours, there would be substantial differences in the lifestyle and social norms ascribed to them based on gender. This is because in such cases, the situations to which the individuals of a society are exposed to or familiar greatly differ based on gender. For instance, men would be exposed more to male-specific occupational domains, whereas women would be more familiar with home and family domains as well as female-specific occupational domains. For these reasons, gender is often considered as a social variable that has the potential enough to cause variations in the linguistic structure and pattern. For example, prosodic features of women's speech are easily identifiable to be distinct from that of the males. In many societies, a male individual who by nature speaks with feminine prosody and intonation often faces some stigma and is labelled to be effeminate. On the other hand, the reverse does not involve such stigma. This hints at the gender disparity that prevails in the society. Thus, linguistic variations influenced by gender are not only those that occur in the level of prosody but also in other levels such as phonology, morphology, etc. The domains involved in the speech of men and women would also significantly differ because the activities in which they are involved are different, especially when a community has different occupational activities assigned to men and women.

3. Age

Age is one of the sociolinguistic variables often taken into consideration in most studies on sociolinguistic investigations. The linguistic variations found between individuals of different groups might be presumed to be caused by seclusion and interaction of peer groups which often involve groups of individuals of similar age. The interests and behaviour of these social groups also vary based on their age. Thus, this results in variations in language that are different in different age groups. The language of the younger generation is always known for neologisms, and the language of the older generation is known for old-fashioned expressions that seem to be archaic for the rest of the population. It can be stated that individuals of the older generation preserve many valuable linguistic expressions and saying; this includes proverbs, idioms, references from parables, etc, and preserve their dialect features. In contrast, individuals of the younger generation are more used to neologisms, standard language usage in media, quotes and comic references from movie dialogues, etc. The term "generation gap" also highlights the disparity that exists between individuals of different age groups. Such notions imply that it is natural to find differences even in their language. Age is of particular concern in sociological studies on Asian societies because culturally, Asians are imbibed with the notion of respect for elders as a social and moral etiquette. In addition, individuals of the younger generation are exposed to media, technology, and foreign languages (mainly English). This significantly impacts their language as well. Language attitude also varies among age groups. Individuals of the younger generation often refrain from local usages and shift to standard language as a matter of prestige and to avoid stigma or being identified as a member of Adi-Dravidar society. On the other hand, individuals of the older generation do not show this attitude and seem to be relatively comfortable in being identified as a member of their community. Another reason behind this phenomenon might be that the individuals of the older generation are involved less in intergroup communication given their limited exposure and opportunities, whereas, on the other hand, individuals of the younger generation have ample opportunities to mingle with other communities and have exposure to intergroup communication, in which they like to portray themselves as though they are part of the group and do not want to be thought as being alien in their peer group. These factors are responsible for the variations that are found to be influenced by age as a social variable. Based on it, generally, the following stratification is often followed in sociolinguistics:

(a) Young age group
(b) Middle age group
(c) Old age group.

4. Caste

In Indian society, caste plays a major role in constructing the social setup. To understand caste, it is important to know its origin. The caste system originally came from the notion of hereditary, family occupation. The origin of the caste system needs more historical and anthropological study. However, it was built based on hereditary occupation. Unlike other social variables, the scenario of caste is highly complex. The reason is that there are numerous castes and each one occupies a place among other castes, forming a hierarchical social network. That is, some castes are considered superior and some as inferior, and many of them have equal status with many other castes. It is important to note that, caste is more rigid than religion. That is, one can change one's religion based on his or her beliefs and will, whereas castes are assigned during birth. The majority of Indian society is made up of endogamous communities that can be identified by various caste names. Unlike other social variables, in Indian society, in the ancient days, caste played a major role in discrimination. It can be stated that in Indian society, there have been more caste riots than religious riots. The reason is that the society is secular in terms of religious beliefs. However, in terms of caste, a fundamentalist attitude has prevailed. The ancient days had caste-based discrimination at its peak. The inferior castes were treated as untouchables, and the superior castes enjoyed more privileges. Many communities were secluded in the name of caste, and the downtrodden were even denied basic rights such as education and prevented from entering temples. The present-day scenario is different. But this does not mean that the caste system has come to an end. It seems that there is a long way to go to get rid of caste-based differences in Indian society. The reason is that although discrimination based on the caste system has come to an end, it has not disappeared from the minds of the people. That is why Indian society is still predominated by endogamous castes. In other words, the majority of Indians in the present-day situation prefer to marry within their caste, and inter-caste marriages have not taken over traditional inter-caste marriages. Although one would wonder why the caste system still exists and what benefits it confers to the individuals or society, from the sociological perspective, it seems that individuals consider caste as an important identity of themselves and do not want to genetically mingle with those of the other castes. Anthropologically, this might be seen as a clan attitude, in which a clan prefers to retain their identity and avoid outsiders entering their social and matrimonial setup and are self-dependent for their progeny. These factors make caste a strong sociolinguistic variable that can potentially influence language. Various studies on caste dialects in Tamil have been conducted. It is to be noted that even at present, some families are involved in their hereditary occupation that their forefathers did. These include agriculture, carpentry, gold jewellery, pottery, and fishing. etc. In such cases, the caste dialects would be correlated with the occupational vocabulary and domain.

Castes with a sizable number of populations in Tamil Nadu are the following:
Brahmins including Deehshidar

1. Iyengar
2. Iyer
3. Chettiyar
4. Vellala
5. Mudaliyar
6. Nadar
7. Padayachi
8. Palla
9. Paraya
10. Yadava

In general, one can group these castes using a three-way classification based on hierarchy: (i) Brahmin, (ii) non-Brahmin, and (iii) Dalit. The caste group chosen for the present study is Dalit.

5. Region

Before discussing the importance of region as a social variable, it is important to introduce the possibilities that it can contribute to the variations in language. That is, a geographically large and diverse land would constitute many boundaries in the landmass. These physical barriers would result in some kind of separation between the societies by limiting their contact with each other. For instance, one could see distinct dialects and languages in elevated regions than in the plains. This is because prolonged isolation and separation of the community from the rest of the communities or their neighbouring communities would result in increased variation in the language. Similarly, isolated masses of settlements also result in dialects that are specific to some clusters of regions. Further, the influence of the languages of the neighbouring regions also should be taken into consideration as a potential factor that induces variations in language that result in the phenomenon of regional dialects. In light of this, to understand the extent to which Tamil dialects can regionally vary, one should first look at the geographic parameters that are viable to cause variations in the language as a result of physical separations, and then the variations can be correlated to see how the geography has influenced language. In this regard, to be considered as a social variable, the variable "region" should be described in terms of its scenario in Tamil Nadu. Tamil Nadu encompasses a total area of 130,060 square kilometres and comprises thirty-two districts. It has hilly areas in the southern, western and north-west regions. Its neighbouring state is Kerala in the West, in which Malayalam is spoken; Andhra in the North-East, in which Telugu is spoken; and Karnataka in the North-East direction, in which Kannada is spoken. These geographical conditions, neighbouring languages, and varying population densities of the state give rise to clusters of communities that have their

specific regional dialects. Some of the major regional dialects of Tamil in Tamil Nadu are the Central Tamil dialect, Chennai Tamil dialect, Thirunelveli dialect, Coimbatore dialect, and Kanyakumari dialect.

6. Income

Income plays a role in providing someone or their family the social status. Hence, income is one of the main parameters usually taken as a measure of one's social status. This is because income not only determines status but also confers power to the individual or the family with support to lead a comfortable life. Income has been considered as a sign of one's social power and status by many authors such as Trudgill (1974), Labov (1966), Karunakaran (1974), and Wolfram (1969), among others. These authors studied language variations factored by income as a social variable. The Adi-Dravida community, like most other communities, can be categorized into three major groups based on the level of income, namely,

1. Low-income group
2. Middle-income group and
3. High income group

For administrative reasons, the government of Tamil Nadu has established a criterion based on which individuals can be grouped into different income groups, namely, low, medium, and high-income groups. This grouping was done based on the annual income level inclusive of all sources. Individuals with an annual income of up to Rs. 12,000 (including all economic sources) fall under the low-income group; similarly, those with Rs. 12,001 to 24,000 fall under the middle-income group; and those more than Rs. 24,000 fall under the high-income group. This criterion of classification can also be applied to Adi-Dravidas, who are the study population for the present investigation. Adi-Dravida students who study in government educational establishments enjoy certain privileges according to which income group they can be categorized. Students from the low-income group benefit from full fee concession and full scholarships (provided by the Government of India). The students from the middle-income group get only half the fee concession and half the scholarship. In contrast, students from the high-income group get no financial aid at all. This is because the government believes that individuals of this group are economically strong enough to meet their educational expenditures. Hence, it is evident that income plays a major role in Indian society by affecting various other factors. For this study, informants from the medium-income group were chosen to avoid linguistic variations that can be caused by income, instead of education.

7. Education

Education is an influential social variable that has a significant impact on the social status and position of an individual in society. This is because education provides a foundation for employment. In addition, education also confers on the individuals a socially authoritative position. This can be witnessed from the respectable position an educated individual occupies in a society, especially in rural settings. The reason behind this is the relatively broad exposure and

acquaintance with world affairs that an educated individual has, which is not only beneficial for him or her but also for society as well. The close association of education with employment indicates that education is also closely related to other social variables. Social status is directly linked to economic status, as has been mentioned in the previous sections. Therefore, education can also be seen to reflect some amount of social status. In studying Tamil dialects based on a sociolinguistic approach, scholars such as Gnanam (1980), Irulappan (1979), Karunakaran (1974), Muthuswami Pillai (1981), and Sivashanmugam (1981) have included education as a social variable that influences the speech behaviour. While discussing the role that education plays in society, it is essential to shed light on the scenario of education in the context of the study population. The total literacy level of the Mayiladuturai district is an average of 69.7% (males: 76.3% and females: 63.0%). The rate of literacy in the rural regions is 68.4% and that of the urban regions is 86.1%. The average literacy rate of the Sirkali taluk is 73.9%, of which 79.2% are male literates and 68.5% are female literates. Education. As a result of various efforts put forth by the government such as educational schemes and facilities, recently, the district has seen a drastic growth in the field of education. Numerous educational establishments, both private as well as government institutions have been established in this district. As per 2018 district statistics, there are a total of 2,141 educational bodies in the Mayiladuthurai district. This includes primary to University-level institutions. These data suggest that education plays a major role in influencing the social dimensions of the study population. These statistics suggest the drastic growth of education in the study area in recent years. In this regard, one could expect its influence on the society as well as its language. Therefore, the present investigation is an attempt to study language variations caused by education. To study this phenomenon, the speech variety of the educated population is compared with that of the uneducated population.

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