

Language-attitudes of Lambada youth in a language contact situation between Telugu and Lambadi languages

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Lambadi is an Indo-Aryan language of the Lambada community, which is essentially script-less, and is bound to be expressed in the scripts of host languages like Telugu, Marathi, Hindi, etc. In the proposed study we intend to understand the language attitudes of youths of the Lambadi community towards their mother-tongue with respect to dominating language «Telugu». Many linguists have established the fact that the language loss occurs predominantly when young people start to adopt a new language which can lead to behavioural consequences like prejudices towards their own language causing inhibitions in social interaction with the people of their own community [1]. The youth in this study is defined as young people belonging to the age group of 20–30 years of either gender. The study is to be performed among the young people of Lambada community who have migrated from their Home-town of Nalgonda district to a metropolitan like Hyderabad. The study hypothesizes that there exists a certain change in the attitudes of the youth towards their mother tongue as they come in contact with the dominating language Telugu.

Objective: the aim of this article is to understand the level of change in attitudes among urban Lambada youths and its consequences on their mother tongue.

Research materials: the article is a qualitative approach with the methodology adopted is in depth interviews including probes like- «perception on the adequacy of Lambadi language use in the context of Hyderabad», «Relevancy of Lambadi language in gaining employment», «religious sentiments attached towards the Lambadi», «Stigma related to usage of Lambadi language among Telugu language speakers» etc.

Results and novelty of the research: the study is expected to understanding of an interesting phenomenon of Language attitude change among Lambadi speakers eventually leading to identify methods to curb its repercussions on Lambadi language. Dravidian languages are majorly spoken in south India and to which Telugu language belongs and Finno-Ugric languages in this context. The present study would also contribute to the further understanding of such genetic relationship which has also established in Linguistics.

Key words: linguistic attitude of young people, Telugu, Lambadi language.

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Языковое отношение молодёжи ламбада в условиях языкового контакта между языками телугу и ламбади

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АННОТАЦИЯ

Введение: ламбади – это индоарийский язык сообщества ламбада, который, по сути, не имеет собственной письменности и передаётся посредством алфавитов таких языков как телугу, маратхи, хинди и т.д. В предлагаемом исследовании мы намерены понять языковое отношение молодёжи сообщества ламбади к своему родному языку относительно доминирующего языка «телугу». Многие лингвисты установили тот факт, что утеря языка происходит преимущественно тогда, когда молодые люди начинают принимать новый язык, который может привести к таким поведенческим последствиям как предрассудки в отношении их собственного языка, провоцирующим сдержанность в социальном взаимодействии с людьми их собственного сообщества [1]. Молодёжь в этом исследовании определяется как молодые люди обоего пола, относящиеся к возрастной группе 20–30 лет. Исследование проводилось среди молодых людей сообщества ламбада, мигрировавших из своего родного округа Налгонда в такие столицы как, к примеру, Хайдарабад. Исследование предполагает, что существуют определённые изменения в отношении молодёжи к родному языку, когда они вступают в контакт с доминирующим языком телугу.

Цель: понять уровень изменения отношения городской молодёжи ламбада к родному языку и выявить последствия этого.

Материалы исследования: статья представляет собой качественный подход с принятой методологией, заключающийся в глубинных интервью, включая такие темы как «восприятие адекватности использования языка ламбади в контексте Хайдарабада», «релевантность языка ламбади при трудоустройстве», «религиозные чувства, связанные с ламбади», «стигма, связанная с использованием языка ламбади среди говорящих на языке телугу» и т. д.

Результаты и научная новизна: ожидается, что в исследовании будет изучен интересный феномен изменения отношения к языку носителей ламбади, что, в конечном итоге, приведёт к выявлению методов сдерживания его последствий. Дравидийские языки, на которых в основном говорят на юге Индии и к которым относится и язык телугу, и финно-угорские языки в этом контексте. Настоящее исследование будет также способствовать дальнейшему пониманию этих генетических отношений, которые также установлены и лингвистикой.

Ключевые слова: языковое отношение молодёжи, телугу, язык ламбади.

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Introduction

Lambadas, also known as Banjaras, Sugali, Labani, Labana, Lambani, claim to be the descendants of two brothers Mota and Mola, who tended the cattle of Lord Krishna of the Hindu mythology [6]. However, other historians disagree and believe that they are the migrants from Persia or Roman Gypsies. But the name Banjaras came during the period of colonial rulers, also known as the Ghor community. According to historians, Lambadas claim to be of Kshatriya origin who alongside Prithviraj Chauhan against Mohammed Ghor. In an association with Jayachandra, Ghor defeated Prithviraj and ordered the massacre of the Rajput soldiers. To escape their wrath, they migrated to Deccan and south and changed their name to Lambada and Banjaras. On arriving south, they came into contact with Marathi and Telugu among other languages [5]. Thus, they constitute a linguistic minority whose mother tongue is Lambadi but the majority of the state speaks a different Dravidian language- Telugu. Tribal population of the Telangana State, according to 2011 Census, is 32.87 Lakhs [3]. There are approximately 14,98,800 Lambada people living in Telangana region. The Lambada people of Telangana have settled down in various cities, but Hyderabad being the capital city provides with better opportunities of livelihood, therefore observing higher migration from Lambada communities. The target population of this study are Lambada people who have migrated from Nalgonda region to Hyderabad. According to Tribal welfare department, Government of Andhra Pradesh there are 17,145 Lambada people currently residing in Hyderabad, and 3,20,959 Lambada people live in Nalgonda district.

The Lambadas are listed under 'Other Backward Classes' (OBC) in Rajasthan and Punjab. Whereas in the government of Andhra Pradesh

and Karnataka have listed them under Scheduled caste and schedule tribe respectively. The Lambada community dispersed themselves all over mainland India, predominantly in southern part of India, in Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Orissa, and in the Northern part including, Gujarat, Punjab, Himachal Pradesh etc. They have settled all over India but are concentrated more in the Southern India, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Central India. The following table lists out their population with respect to the states:

| State | Population |
|----------------|-------------|
| Andhra Pradesh | 2.2 million |
| Karnataka | 1.1 million |
| Maharashtra | 0.9 million |
| Madhya Pradesh | 04 million |
| Rajasthan | 0.3 million |

As the Lambada community is segregated all over India, their language is not standardised and is characterized by borrowed words from dominant languages like Telugu, Marathi, Kannada, etc. Thus it is important to document Lambadi language due to its vulnerability towards 'Language loss' owing to the absence of a script. The younger generation from migrant families are growing up learning the dominant languages and as a result their mother tongue which is Lambadi, is being ignored. This study answers research questions like what are the attitudes the young Lambada people have towards Lambadi language? What are the reasons towards these attitudes they have developed? And how are these attitudes going to impact in the preservation of their mother tongue i.e. Lambadi language?

The primary objectives of this study would be to:

- Gain insight on the attitudes of Lambada youths towards their mother tongue 'Lambadi' and their second language 'Telugu'
- To understand various reasons for these attitudes which have developed among the Lambada youths

- To critically analyse the impact of this attitude of the Lambada youth on the future of their mother tongue.

The pressure of social acceptance on the youngsters can lead to the abandonment of their native language, [1]. This social pressure leads the youngsters to take up the second language and adapt the new mannerisms like the native speakers of that language [2]. It has also been an established fact that a positive attitude towards a new or a dominant culture encourages young people to learn about the culture and develop a favourable attitude towards the language of the dominant culture boosting the learning of second language [7]. In every analysis of language attitudes it has been pointed out that people acquire a second language as their main language of communication or become influenced by the dominant language in order to secure an agreeable place in between two cultural systems. Some studies analyse the attitudes of people who have very less knowledge in their mother tongue and are proficient in the second language, are very enthusiastic towards the development and preservation of their mother tongues by encouraging their children to learn their native languages. They also are willing to invest in the development of their “ancestral language” by investing in institutions, as observed by Jean Paul Kouega in his Cameroonian study [4]. Thus the existing research suggests that the language attitudes of people towards any language can have a positive or a negative impact both, and is likely to be influenced by the availability of opportunities and social acceptability.

Materials and methods

The methods involved in this study are exclusively qualitative and are performed alongside a quantitative questionnaire intended for the PhD thesis “Influence of Telugu on Lambadi language; A quantitative study on migrated urban Lambada people of Nalagonda district, Telangana”. The sample was selected from the migrated population of Nalagonda district who have settled in Hyderabad city. The study strictly aims to explore the attitudes of young Lambada people hence the age group selected for this study lies between 20–35 years. Equal number of males and females were interviewed. The sample size was restricted to 50, with 25 males and 25 females, as the sample size for the PhD thesis for 20–35 age group was 50.

The sample location was identified through snowball sampling method/chain-referral sampling

method. The Lambada community centres in the city referred as «Lambada Samaj» were approached with the help of contacts the researcher already had and subjects for the study identified. These subjects then recruited or introduced the researcher to other subjects from among their acquaintances in the event of these acquaintances being suitable for the study criteria. The sampling criteria involved families belonging to the middle class, with exclusion criteria being working class and the elite class because working class population generally involves people who work for daily wages and are bound to return to their native place and do not have enough time to engage in language and cultural adoption. Whereas the elite class do not have the necessity to learn the other language as they are fully sufficient to support themselves without much interaction with the local Telugu speakers. In cases where people belonging to the exclusion criteria do speak Telugu, it has been found after a thorough research that they are negligible in number. Thus in order to capture maximum language influence the middle class Lambada families who have migrated to Hyderabad to settle down permanently are determined to be employed in this study. The middle class are expected to engage with the local Telugu speakers on a daily basis and hence taking up the certain words. The middle class population is found to be more accessible and traceable through the key informants.

The males and females of the younger age group were approached for in-depth interviews which were qualitative in nature. The respondents were interviewed after obtaining their consent in the form of their signatures on the consent forms. These interviews involved certain pre-defined questions capturing their opinions towards their mother tongue and the second language. The responses to the questions were written down (verbatim) by the interviewer and were subjected to thematic analysis. The data was broken into various codes which were in sync with the objectives of the study, like «Adequacy of Lambadi language use in the context of Hyderabad», «Relevancy of Lambadi language in gaining employment», «religious sentiments attached towards the Lambadi», «Stigma related to usage of Lambadi language among Telugu language speakers», etc. These codes were then assessed for themes like «positive attitudes», «reasons for positive attitudes», «negative attitudes», «reasons for negative attitudes», «perception of language preservation» etc. The final report was produced by reviewing patterns between themes in a theoretical memo. To establish the credibility of the report a

final member checking in the form of respondent feedback was performed by giving them a final report and obtaining their responses for the same.

Results

It was interesting to note that, the reasons young Lambada people gave in order to justify their increasing preference of Telugu language were based on Social acceptability and economic opportunities. For example, the young men and women who completed their education in Hyderabad found it difficult to communicate with their contemporaries in schools due to their lack of command over Telugu. It was constantly stressed by the respondents that their social circle improved once they adopted the second language and started using it increasingly in their daily lives. It also helped them establish a relationship of trust and strengthen their rapport with their superiors or colleagues in their respective workplace. The positive attitudes of the respondents towards Telugu language had been redundant throughout their responses.

On the other hand when inquired about their perceptions on their mother tongue i.e. Lambadi language the majority of respondents (43 out of 50) spoke about the existence of stigma related to using Lambadi in their workplaces or educational institutes. A lot of the responses pointed out the fact that Lambadi language helped them very little to get access to opportunities to attain livelihood. It mainly instilled a sense brotherhood among their own community and they restricted the use of their mother tongue to their houses and amongst the members of their own community. They also repetitively suggested that, they preferred to speak in Telugu, Hindi or English when they found themselves in the presence of even one Non-Lambadi speaking individual. This behaviour could be interpreted as; the youngsters are also deeply connected to their mother tongue and feel the need to protect it from the influence of other languages. At the same time they find themselves unable to preserve their language and attribute the reason to the absence of a script. They also point out that growing up in an urban area like Hyderabad, makes them feel uprooted from their culture, and in order to find a balance between their surroundings and acquire socio-cultural acceptability they are compelled to take up the second language, and limit the use of their mother tongue. More than half of the respondents accept that their mother tongue is on the verge of being lost in time as their children are more fluent in Telugu than Lambadi.

Females constituted half of the sample size interviewed. Almost all the females could speak Telugu as fluently as they could speak Lambadi. According to the respondents through their self reporting, the females were found to be more proficient in Lambadi as compared to males as depicted in the following pie chart:

percentage of fluency in Lambadi language among females and males

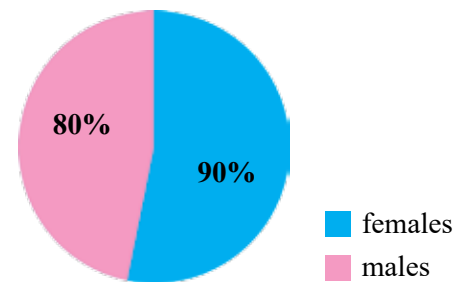


Fig 1: Pie chart depicting the percentage of fluency in Lambadi language between men and women

Whereas men are fluent in Telugu as compared to women as shown in the following pie chart:

percentage of fluency in Telugu among males and females

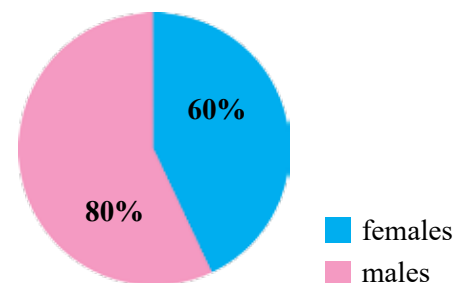


Fig 2: Pie chart depicting the percentage of fluency in Telugu language between men and women

One interpretation of the finding where women are more fluent in Lambadi than men owing to the fact that a majority of these women were housewives and hence lived a more reserved life which is restricted to their immediate surroundings and family, thus retaining more original Lambadi language and less of Telugu language than men. Whereas men were mostly the bread winners of their respective families were compelled to seek employment outside their communities and hence have maximum contact with Telugu speakers and lose their fluency in Lambadi language.

Overall the majority of youth admitted to realize the fact that Lambadi language suffers many disadvantages ranging from stigma to lack of a script, leading to language-loss. They find themselves responsible for much of this phenomenon due to their ignorance of the importance of preserving their mother tongue. Their responses bring to light their concerns for their ancestral language and restoration of Lambadi language to its original glory, to that end they admittedly find themselves willing to contribute financially to educational institutions for the development of their native language. To those who found themselves not capable of financial donations, willing to encourage their children to inculcate the habit of learning and preserving their mother tongue proactively at the same time also maintain a good command over other important languages which are essential to sustain in a foreign land.

These are few words which stand out from the analysis which are perceived difficult by the Lambada youth, as in these words emerged out as the ones which are falling out of general usage among the native Lambadi speakers. As reported by the younger age group they find it more easier to replace these words with popular Telugu words, as they find themselves unable to recall Lambadi words at the tip of their tongue due to lack of usage in their households among the older generation. Here are the list of few lambada words which have been effected majorly by language attitude and language contact:

| | | |
|----------------------|----------------------------|--------------|
| tuft, lock (of hair) | mu:fo | kutʃʃu |
| umbilical cord | Suṅti | bhramha mudi |
| elbow | ku:ni | mo:tejji |
| wrist | haθe:li | mani kattu |
| fist | Mukki | pidikili |
| heel | je:di | madama |
| thigh | dʒa:g | θoda |
| choke | atka:gi | Porakekkta |
| pimple | k ^{hi} :le | motima |
| (be) bald | k ^{ho} :bri ma:θo | batta θala |
| (be) impotent | ba:ila | napumsakudu |
| pus | ra:ð | tʃe:mu |
| life | Ummat | dʒi:viθam |

Discussion and conclusions

The paper analyses the change in attitudes of Lambada people who have migrated from their native Nalagonda region to Hyderabad in search of livelihood and opportunities. This study was exclusively conducted on young age group of the Lambada community as any young generation belonging to a particular community is considered a flag-bearer of that language and is primarily responsible for existing language attitudes. The Lambada youth is aware of the drawbacks their mother tongue exhibits. Being the language of the migrants it not only suffers from the stigma coming from the rest of the Telugu speaking majority but also rapidly losing its patronage from its own native speakers owing to various socio-cultural and economic issues. The attitude of the Lambada youth is currently between ambiguity and responsibility towards their mother tongue. Ambiguity, because they find it challenging to preserve a language which does not have a script, which makes it necessary for them to learn a scripted language for them to be able to document the heritage of their ancestral language. This opens gates for language influence of the dominant language (Telugu) on their minority language (Lambadi). This leads to borrowing terms from the dominant language ultimately leading to language loss. This phenomenon needs to be brought into attention of the linguistics community so that they can work on identifying ways to document a script-less language such as Lambadi effectively at the same time preserving its authenticity. Awareness of the fact that Lambadi is on the verge of becoming an endangered language must be propagated in an academic environment and researches must be directed towards exploring similar nuances of Lambadi language. This cannot just be achieved by academic institutions but also actively engaging with the Lambadi community about the importance of preserving their mother tongue.

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