



LANGUAGE DEATH: A STUDY OF SUBALTERN LANGUAGE IN MAHARASHTRA

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Abstract: *This research undertakes a sociolinguistic study of Waddari Community in Solapur, Maharashtra. This is one such underprivileged and marginalized group in Solapur which has been experiencing threats to its linguistic and cultural identity. The research aims to analyze the issue of language maintenance and language shift with special reference to the bilingual behaviour of the Waddari community in Solapur, giving emphasis on its language and socio-cultural bindings. It also concentrates on the behaviour of Waddari community while dealing with their language in 'Third Space'. The study concentrates on the Waddari people in multicultural situation that how they conceal their own indigenous language and personal identity and adopt the established language to enunciate their power and dignity.*

Keywords: *Bilingual Behaviour, Subaltern, Language Death, Endangered Language, Language Shift, Language Maintenance, Third space etc.*

Materials and Methods:

1] Method:

This is the *primary research* based totally on the observation of Waddari community and their attitude towards their own heritage language. The **observation method** is used to analyze the facts and fictions of the Waddari community.

2] Research Statement:

Bilingual behaviourism denotes diverse attitude of a Waddari speakers towards their mother tongue and the colonial/ established language they adopt for their convenience. They hide their cultural and linguistic identity when they are in multicultural situation. Waddari communities always have the feeling that their native language is superstitious, agglutinative, passive and slavish. However they have an ideal approach towards the established languages like Marathi, Hindi and English. This research paper comprehensively explains the bilingual behaviourism of Waddari community with concrete examples.

Scope and Limitation (Study Area):

The present work entitled *Language Death: A Study of Subaltern Language in Maharashtra* is a primary research which concentrates on the meticulous observation of Waddari community and its bilingual behaviour in Solapur. The area of

research is selected deliberately to study the problems, prospects and challenges of Waddari language at micro level.

Objectives:

The present research proposes to work for the fulfillment of the following objectives:

- 1) To identify the socio-cultural conditions in which the Waddari community has to struggle for its existence.
- 2) To perceive the status of the Waddari language in comparison with Marathi that is the dominant language of Maharashtra and English, a colonial language.
- 3) To identify the status of Waddari language in the *Third Space* or hybrid space (multicultural space).
- 4) To examine the Waddari language on different linguistic levels to get a clear perception of its distinct features as the language of a particular speech community.
- 5) To analyze the bilingual behavior of the speakers from the different generations of this language.
- 6) To evaluate the determinants of language maintenance and language shift with the help of aforementioned socio-cultural factors and bilingual behavior of the speakers.
- 7) To come up with certain suggestions to preserve

this endangered language.

Data Collection:

The research also attempts to consult all the source materials on the life and culture of the Waddari community. With the speakers of the Waddari language to know their experiences and views related to the language and its importance in their social and cultural life. For the meticulous analysis the researcher collected the recorded speech of the speakers from different generations of the speech community.

For the collection and organization of the research material, the researcher visited following Libraries: EFLU, Hyderabad, JNU, Central Library, New Delhi; Indira Gandhi Central Library, Hyderabad and other major departments of linguistics for theoretical background. The researcher consulted the experts in the field to get a better perspective in shaping the ideas.

Review of Literature:

Studies related to marginalized groups, languages and cultures have been gaining importance in the recent time. Research in areas such as language politics, linguistic dominance and imposition, linguistic hegemony and imperialism, language maintenance and language shift etc. has attracted the attention of scholars and it has become part of postcolonial studies and linguistics. Very few people studied pedantically on Wadar community.

Sociolinguists and research scholars across the world have been working on the issues of 'endangered languages' and the socio-cultural status of linguistic minorities. At a conference of the UNESCO held in November 1993, the General Assembly adopted the 'Endangered Languages Project'- including the 'Red Book of Endangered Languages'. Also, in 1995, the Foundation for Endangered Languages was established in the UK. In February 2009, the UNESCO launched an online edition of the Atlas of endangered languages which covers the whole world.

A few significant works in the area of

language maintenance and language shift include: 'Can Threatened Languages be Saved? : Reversing Language Shift' edited by Joshua A. Fishman; *Endangered Languages: Language Loss and Community Response* by Lenore A. Grenoble and Lindsay J. Whaley; and David Crystal's *Language Death*; Suresh Canagarajah's *Reclaiming the Local in Language Policy and Practice*.

Apart from these major works in the area, Aniko Hatoss's (a lecturer in the Centre for Language Learning and Teaching at the University of Southern Queensland) unpublished PhD dissertation entitled *First Language Maintenance, Bilingualism, and Acculturation in the Hungarian Community of Southern Queensland, Australia* and the papers on indigenous African and American languages with reference to their impoverishing condition and the need of multilingual education published in Ajit Mohanty et al's *Multilingual Education for Social Justice* must also be mentioned here.

Indian scholars and sociolinguists like Probal Dasgupta, Khubchandani, Anvita Abbi, Ajit Mohanty and many others have been dealing with the problem of endangered languages and they have contributed significantly to the enquiries about language maintenance and language shift. L.M. Khubchandani's contribution to Santali language may be noted here as an instance. Similarly, research has been done on the bilingual behaviour of the Naikan.

Analysis:

The Waddari community in Maharashtra is a denotified and nomadic tribe. It has its own cultural and linguistic identity. This community earlier migrated from Telangana region. Joshua report declares that there are 33,52,000 population in India, 1,52,000 in Sri Lanka and in Pakistan there are 5700 Hindu Waddars, 1,03,000 Muslim Waddars. (Joshua Project) Being declared as a 'criminal tribe' by the British government, the community has been forced into a marginalized status till date and has existed in subservient and subhuman conditions. The community shares its own language with its distinct linguistic features, but since the group has been

deprived of educational facilities for several generations, no effort has been made so far to develop a script for the Waddari language. The Waddari language is considered as one of the dialects of Telugu, as some linguists do, then, as the Padmashalis have it, the community should have had some attachment to the Telugu culture and life style. However, one cannot find this kind of affinity.

Being very close to this community, the researcher meticulously observes its linguistic behaviour. He notices that this behaviour keeps on changing as per social class membership and financial and educational status. It is quite interesting to note that despite its rootless and marginalized status in the social system of our country, the community has managed to maintain its language. Ironically, the maintenance of the language has been possible only because of the underprivileged and illiterate population of the community. The use of language has been restricted to these members only. Hence it is often considered as a symbol of illiteracy, poverty and backwardness.

Factors like urbanization and education are bringing. It is also noticed that the second generation speakers of the Waddari language, although they were born and brought up in the same linguistic environment and had picked up the same language of the family and social interaction, seldom encourage their children to pick up the same language for interaction within their family and society. Indeed, they take pride in projecting Marathi as their first language because of the presumption that their language is “inherently deficient and illogical” and its use may block their road towards upward social mobility. This process of a language shift is becoming a prominent

feature of both the second and third generation speakers of the Waddari language. Psychologically speaking, there is a wide gap between their mother tongue, i.e. the Waddari language, which is not the language of literacy, and Marathi, the language of literacy. Consequently, it affects the mentality of even those members of the Waddari community who wish to maintain their language.

Indian society comprises of larger established communities as well as heterogeneous marginal groups. In the process of migration, urbanisation, globalisation and civilisation, the cities and metropolises of India have been established with larger hybrid settings and environments. In this segregated *hybrid* space, which is also called as *Third Space* (Homi Bhabha, 1994), only one established culture or language has upheld the gratuitous and superfluous significance of them all. For example, Marathi and English in Maharashtrian educational institutions, offices, trade and commerce, shopping malls and markets of cities have captured their positions by manipulating the language of marginal groups. It has later become more rigid, authoritative and discriminating in controlling marginal indigenous culture and language. The established languages have become instruments of power and matter of pride and dignity; while the languages of indigenous marginal groups have remained ghettoised and endangered. Their language has become a matter of shame and guilt. On the other hand, certain languages being thrown out of the major domains of power and resources as such official, legal, formal use, education, trade and commerce, get impoverished and ultimately their very survival is threatened. This process is associated with linguistic diversity and the death or ‘murder’ of languages. (Mohanty, 2009).

Difference	Telugu	Waddari Telugu	Meaning
Pronunciation Difference	Po, Poda	Fo, Foda, (Cacophonic)	Go
	mAAmu	mImu	We
Morphological Difference	vastunnAva	vaccAnkAv	Coming
Lexical Differences	Nenuippudu office <i>kivelladi</i>	Naakippudu office <i>keayellabek</i>	I have to go office now
Tone	Graceful, Elegant, Sonorous	Slavish, Beggarly	--

The above table, figures out the difference between established Telugu language and Waddari Telugu language. It makes the clear distinction that how the sounds, word structures and tone is specific of their own. So the detest of the Waddari people about their language may be the one reason. They shift their language and go for the established or colonial language like Marathi, Hindi or English.

Keeping this background in mind the present research work attempts to understand the determining factors in language maintenance and language shift by analysing the socio-cultural, historical and linguistic setting of Solapur, Maharashtra and by taking into account the Waddaris and their language in this cultural background.

Major Findings:

This study concentrates on the reasons and necessity for the language shift and finally figures out the major findings.

- 1] Waddari community thinks that their language is slavish, agglutinative, superstitious, inferior, low graded.
- 2] There is a general feeling of the Waddari community that their language is non-standard, low caste language.
- 3] Third reason of the shift of their language is word limits. They do not have written script (tradition).
- 4] There is no flexibility and adaptability to adopt established one because of rigidity of community. They do not loan words from technology, information and new global arena.
- 5] Lack of writers who can write their experience in their own language.
- 6] Some people deliberately change their names. They were traditional names with caste, animals, waste and low traditional Goddess. For example: Karnikanti, Bhimappa Vaddar, Buchhaya, Kallappa, Yellamma, Margamma, Shettyappa, Yellamma, Landage, etc.
- 7] Waddari people adopt colonial language and colonial culture to dominate on other established languages such as Marathi, Hindi and English.

They even shift their language avoid their caste, to go away from their culture, to annihilate their previous identity of caste, creed, race, ethnicity.

- 8] Wadars often considered outsiders because of their indifferent linguistic identity. They were kept away from the a mainstream languages of Marathi speaking people and deeply disliked by Padmashali, Marwadi, Rajasthani, Panjabi, Marathi and Kannada speakers.
- 10] Monolingual Waddari speaker kept mutually unintelligible.
- 11] Language Death is not a threat, instead it is for self-transformation. Death of language is not death of community, rather a self-transformation. The end product of language shift is a complete replacement or language death, but it is normally a gradually a normal process.
- 12] Second Generation and Upward Social Mobility: While attempting a modest survey, I noticed that, with upward social mobility, and acceptance of sedentary life language shift is becoming a prominent strategy, used by Waddar especially educated ones. This shift is occurring through the bilingual behavior of the second generation speakers
- 13] Parents unwilling to use and transmit their language heritage to the next generation. They are unwilling to use and transmit their heritage language to the next generation. Once the language is thrown out of the family or in-group social communication, there is hardly any possibility of its survival.
- 14] Third space is one more reason for this cultural loss. In the second colonial space the Waddari speaker forcefully suppresses himself. It is restricted to speak the indigeneous language of first space. In the third space of hybridization same thing happen.

Significance of the Study

With growing globalization, the importance of preserving local culture and traditions is gaining wide acceptance among thinkers and intellectuals. Similarly, the process of deforestation and

urbanization, causing threat to tribal life and culture is coming under the severe criticism of social activists and reformers.

This research work attempts to deal with the issue of language maintenance and language shift found in the Waddari community in Solapur, Maharashtra which would, definitely, help in understanding the problem on a micro level. Despite its limitations, the work might prove significant in understanding the social, cultural, educational and especially, the linguistic problem of this community and other denotified and nomadic tribes such as Vaidu, Tirmali (Nandi wale), and Bhamta, Lamani, Kaikadi, etc. which are also having a similar linguistic and cultural background. Eventually, it can provide some insights for those who devise language education policies for the children belonging to such disadvantaged and underprivileged groups.

As the study basically attempts to analyse the Waddari language with all its linguistic features and variations, it might contribute to the preservation of one of the endangered languages and its verbal repertoire. Thus the present research work seeks to be significant by providing insights into the understanding of the social, cultural and linguistic status of the marginalized people and their

significance in human society. Finally, the present research work prove to be significant and helpful to research communities and research institutionscommunity.

The present study focuses on the language of a particular community and hence its relevance in sociology is apparent. It also takes a stand from a cultural point of view and for that it seeks to draw ideas from cultural studies. Since the study also has a bearing on the economic, political and educational status of the Waddari community, it has to be multidisciplinary in nature. Most significantly, its relevance to the field of language education is considerable. In short, the study will have its impacts on sociology, cultural studies, politics, economics, education and psychology.

Conclusion:

This study comprehensively observed the bilingual behavior of Waddari community in the third space. Waddari community, day by day, going away from their heritage language and adopting a new language to overcome on their oddities. All in all, it is noticed that the Waddari language is day by day endangered because of Waddari speaker's shift from their heritage language to established one.

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