Trends in Language Shift and Maintenance in the Eranad Dialect of Malayalam

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On Defining Linguistic Identity

Identity refers to an individual's subjective feeling of belonging to a particular group. Language is of central importance to identity because through language we negotiate and share our identity with others. Multi-ethnic features of India deepen linguistic diversity with hundreds of regional dialects within the same language. These dialects reflect the everyday experience of individuals living in different parts of the country and strongly shape their cultural identity.

In a highly stratified society each stratum holds unique identity which is manifested in the speech behavior of the group. The awareness of the social, cultural and ethnic peculiarities among the members of the group can be termed as identity consciousness. The formation of the identity is found to be influenced by diverse social variables. These social factors undergoes tremendous changes in the contemporary social situations marked by urbanization, technological changes, industrialization, globalization etc,. The changes occurred in the social factors causes changes in the social variables that determine the identity.

Analysis of Identity

In linguistics, the identity is analyzed in terms of the linguistic data obtained from the specific linguistic group. It is determined according to the attitude of the group towards

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own language and the contact language, if the speech community is situated in a bi or multi lingual region. The concept of language attitude helps to analyze language use and change on a macro social level. (Landry and Allard, 1994:15) It comprises socio structural factors to explain the language maintenance and shift within the community. Therefore, while finding out the degree of identity, the determination of language attitude and the study on the factors influencing the language shift and language maintenance is very important.

Language Shift and Language Maintenance

According to Hoffman (1991:186), "when a community does not maintain its language, but gradually adopts another one, we talk about language shift while 'language maintenance refers to a situation where members of a community try to keep the language they have always used". Hoffman also observed that under certain cultural, social and political conditions, a community might opt to change one set of linguistic tools for another.

One of the important factors that impact on shift and maintenance of language is attitude (Gardner, 1985, Holmes and Harlow, 1991). Attitude refers to "a hypothetical construct used to explain the direction and persistence of human behavior" (Baker, 1992:10). So, it represents internal thoughts, feelings and tendencies in behavior across a variety of contexts.

The Research Problem

The present study tries to explore the changing trends of Eranad dialect of Malayalam in terms of their language attitude. The research problem is, to investigate whether there is any language shift or language maintenance among the Mappilas using Eranad dialect of Malayalam and if so, what role attitude plays in the shift and maintenance of their language.

Hypothesis

- If the speech community shows great interest in the application of their own language in day today life, they give priority to language maintenance and if they prefer contact language or other forms of dialect in day to day life, there is possibility for language shift.
- Language maintenance is the sign of preserving the ethnic and cultural identity and language shift gives the sign of shifting tendency by replacing the ethnic features to a new culture.

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Methodology

The methods common to ethno linguistics ad sociolinguistics—interview (both structure and unstructured) and observation (both participant and no-participant) -- are used in the present study.

To find out the language attitude Primary data are collected by structured questions from the representative sample of the respondents based on the social variables like age, sex, education, social status etc. The questions are directly distributed among the respondents. However in the case of older generation and illiterates the investigator asked questions and explains it, if necessary and collects the answers simultaneously.

The Dialect under Study

The dialect area lies in the Eranad Taluk of Malappuram district of Kerala. A detailed descriptive study on Ernad dialect of Malayalam had been made by Dr G K Panicker in 1973 in his "A description of Ernad Dialect of Malayalam". The present study made use of the linguistic data available in the work of Dr. Panicker for the comparison of the data collected under this study with an aim to determine the trends language shift or language maintenance.

The important characteristics of Eranad Dialect of Malayalam noted by Dr G. K. Panicker are as follows:

1. The absence of the palatal retroflex lateral ḷ and the retroflex and palatal fricatives ṣ and sś.
2. The absence of aspirated stops.
3. The presence of labiodental fricative f and the dental lateral L.
4. –in- as the present tense marker. The southern dialects have unn-
5. High frequency of the verbal noun markers –al. In this dialect it can occur with all verb stems. Some of the dialects have almost lost this verbal noun marker.
6. The verbal participle forms with aaRu (kannanRu, pokaaRu etc) are absent
7. the occurrence of –a as an accusative case marker.
8. Corresponding to the genitive case markers ute and Re, this dialect has a and Ra
9. The absence of the instrumental case suffix aat
10. the appellative category of this dialect is quite limited.
11. The occurrences of a large number of fused phrase units
12. the absence of passive constructions
13. The differences in lexical items.

Arabic loan words are more in this dialect than in other dialects. This dialect too has a good number of Sanskrit loan words, but to a lesser extent when compared to the dialects of the forward Hindus. Barring a very few instances all loan words from non- Sanskrit sources are nouns. Sanskrit loan words too are mainly nouns. However, many of these

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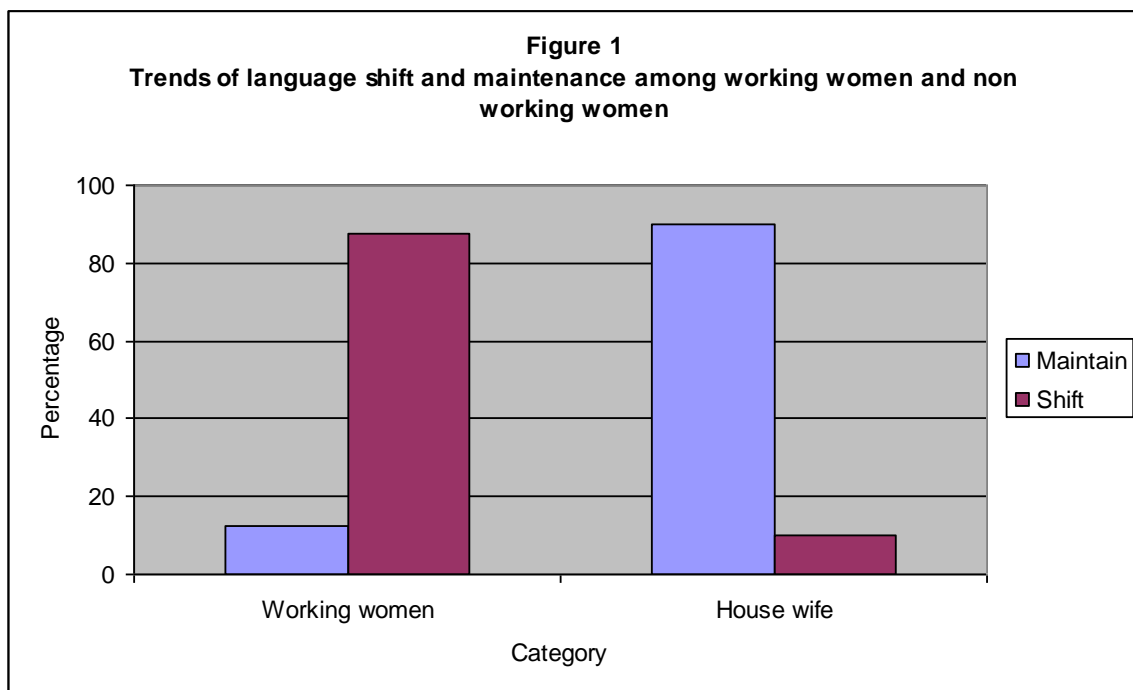
Sanskrit nouns have been verbalized and both noun and verb forms are in usage. The area of pronouns also shows wider difference (Panicker 1973:21).

Evaluation of Language Attitude Among Mappilas

Using a questionnaire the present study tried to assess the language attitude of the Mappilas towards their own dialect and other dialects that they come in to contact. The questionnaire was based on three sociolinguistic variables such as gender, age and education. The age is grouped into 0-25, 25-50, 50 and above. Education is sub grouped into literate, illiterate, matriculated and graduated. Based on these social variables data are collected from 72 respondents from Kondotty village panchayath on the basis of random sampling method.
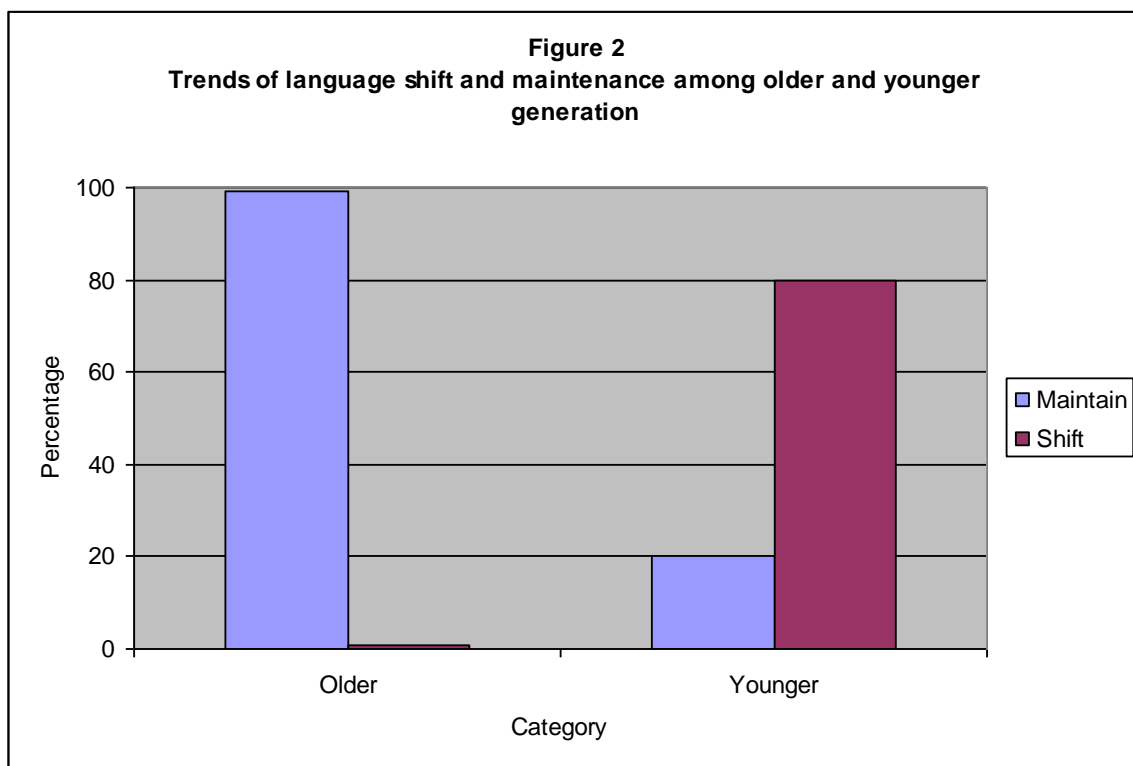
Language Shift and Gender

The data collected from highly informal situations in family atmosphere, festivals and marriage gatherings, informal conversations among pear groups etc shows that men tend to have more orientation towards the standard Malayalam language than women. It is noted that women still retain several features of Eranad dialect of Malayalam. However, the working women who have daily interaction with those who use the standard Malayalam have very little affinity with the Eranad dialect of Malayalam. It affirms the fact that the contact with the wider society is one of the important factors for language shift.

Figure 1
Trends of language shift and maintenance among working women and non working women

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The figure 1 shows that the women maintain the features of Eranad dialect than men. But the working and graduated women shows the tendency to shift from Eranad dialect. The study affirms the sociolinguistic concept that the women shows more orientation toward own dialect, for they are compelled to spend more time in home owing to lack of opportunity to come in to contact with main stream society.

In the detailed examination of the questionnaire it is also noted that the women belong to aged group show more orientation towards own dialect than the women belong to younger generation.
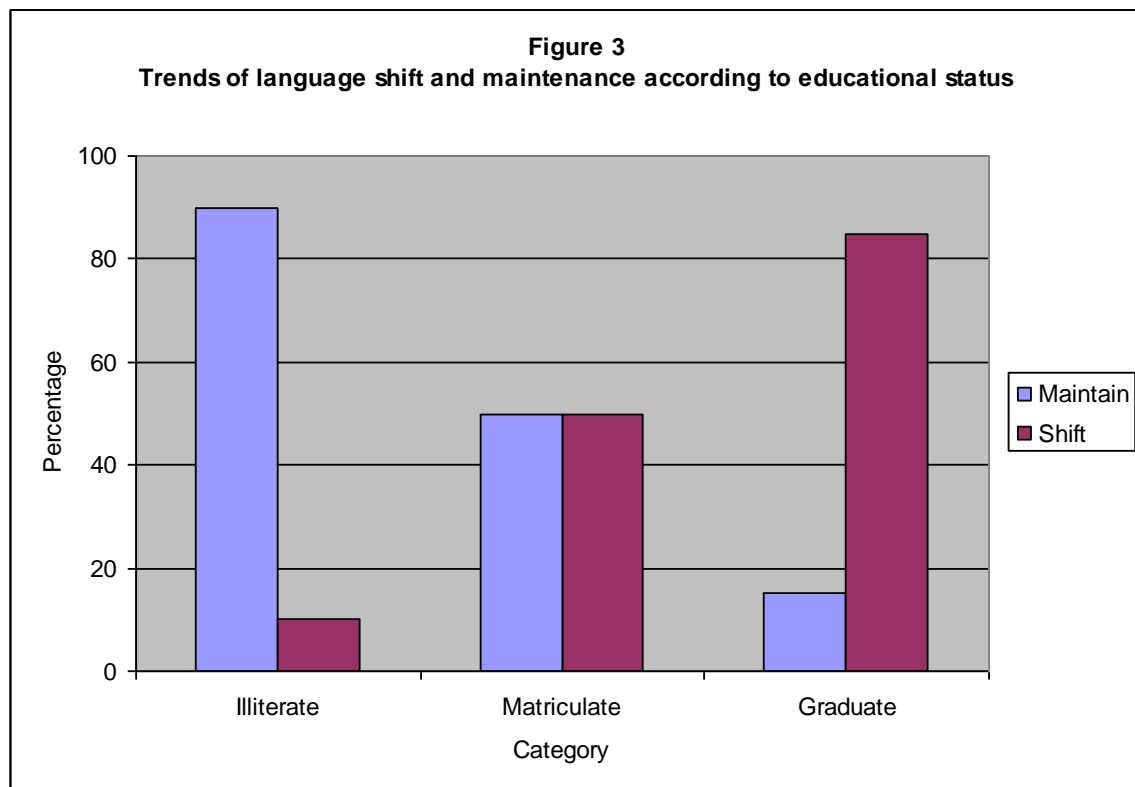
Language and Age

Figure 2
Trends of language shift and maintenance among older and younger generation

The figure 2 clearly shows that the older generation has a tendency to retain and use their traditional dialect features. The younger generation shows less interest in retaining and using all the features of the dialect. The graph shows that when the age is decreased the orientation towards other dialect of Malayalam is increased. The reason for this tendency is the increasing opportunity to interact with wider and mainstream society and also as a result of rapid educational progress.

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Language and Education

The 1961 Census report shows that Eranad has 35.82%. According to 2001 census, the Malappuram District which includes the Eranad has 80% literacy. The number of educational institutions is also increased considerably. It is interesting to examine whether there is any correlation between educational status and language attitude. The figure 3 affirms the fact that the progress in education and the maintenance of the dialect features are negatively correlated. The attitude further varies according to the individuals' progress in higher education. 90% of graduated respondents of the sample shows little interest towards own dialect.

Figure 3
Trends of language shift and maintenance according to educational status

Language Use in the Home Domain

One of the foremost questions of this study was whether there is any difference in the dialect use in the home domain and outside home. The observations and survey clearly proves that majority of the respondents use most of the dialect features in home environment and other highly informal contexts with it spontaneity. During the study some highly educated respondents revealed that using the language other than the local dialect in home domain is mocked at by older generation and relatives with less education.

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Interactional Patterns and Language Use Outside Home

This paper also focused on interactional pattern outside the family domain. Language use outside home was divided into two sub-domains: first, language used in informal situations, such as shops, markets etc, where language is relatively informal. Language use in formal situations, such as in banks or at hospitals were also observed. Even though there is conscious tendency to move away from the dialect features in the language use outside home, the traditional dialect features are unveiled spontaneously in the informal situations such as shops, markets, etc. The language use in formal situations such as bank or at hospitals are more conscious and with little use of dialect features.

Conclusion

There is a general tendency towards language shift among the Mappilas using Eranad dialect of Malayalam. It is apparent more among younger generation. However, such an attitude is clearly manifested among men than women. The highly educated members of the community shows growing tendency to shift from Eranad dialect of Malayalam in both formal and informal situations. It is also noted that the community maintains the dialect features in home domain, but such maintenance are rather spontaneous than purposeful. In the situations outside home domains members consciously shift from the dialect features, but traditional dialect features are frequently unveiled in the informal situations in shops, market etc.

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