



Linguistic Divide in between self and other: A Critical Analysis of Standardisation of Language: A North Kerala Village Study

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Abstract: This study examines the linguistic experiences of three caste categories in a community in North Kerala in an effort to comprehend how caste is embodied in language. It examines how linguistic inequality is caused by language standardisation and how people who speak non-standard languages deal with the issue without forsaking their mother tongue. Through a comparative comparison of three caste groups, including the scheduled caste (SC), other backward class (OBC), and the general category (GEN), the study was carried out in Thachankunnu in Kerala (GEN). The participants' direct experiences with the educational institutions are used to analyse the causes and effects of linguistic discrimination. The theoretical frame of the register has been used as the basis of analysis. The study found that participants experienced job loss and linguistic inequality in class participation, demonstrating the existence of language-based discrimination. In various contexts, dialect shifting is regarded as a means of concealing the social status and identity of vernacular language speakers. Identification of the value of mother tongue, language diversity, and resistance to deprivation all play essential roles in achieving language uniformity.

Keywords: Mother Tongue, Standardisation, Caste, Register, Linguistic Inequality

1. Introduction

Language is a phenomenon that evolves from generation to generation and varies from person to person. "Language is a mark of identity; when we speak, we not only communicate with others but also exhibit in an indirect way which territory we belong to" (Shah et al., 2011, p. 4485). The continuous interaction among different speaking communities leads to fission and fusion in the language. The integration and assimilation of languages always provide a distinct identity to every speaker that enables us to trace back the geography and social settings of the person.

"Language can be defined as a system of conventionally spoken or written symbols by means of which human beings as members of a social group communicate" (Shah et al., 2011, p. 4485). Social life has a relationship with the concept of standardisation of language because the way a person speaks can relate to social class, location, and culture. Besides, the differences in language register competence are, thus, often linked to the asymmetries of power, socioeconomic class, position within hierarchies, and the like (Agha, 2006, p. 146).

The hierarchy of languages can be classified as language versus dialect, classical language versus vernacular language, standard versus non-standard, regional versus national language, and national versus international language (Hany Babu, 2017, p. 23). However, "every language or dialect is as good linguistically, even though not socially, as every other" (Ahearn, 2012, p. 272). The language does not have prestige itself; the standard of various languages is defined according to the prestige of the speakers who speak the language (Milroy, 2001, p. 532). The concept of prestige can be related to the hierarchical order of the caste system; therefore, the language spoken by the upper caste might have been considered a prestigious language. Every language has different varieties, and each variety holds a position in the standard hierarchy of the language system. This standard of varieties in language deals with indexicality, which is incorporated with the social life of the speaker (Milroy, 2001, p. 532). "Intra-linguistic rationalisation is not the reason why some usages were believed to be wrong. The reason is that it is simply common



sense: everybody knows it, it is the part to know it, and you are an outsider if you think otherwise" (Milroy, 2001, p. 536). The concept of right and wrong in a language is oriented toward the comparison of standardised languages. The language understood by everyone is considered the proper or standard language, which can be found in textbooks and official notes, but the language dialect each person possesses through their social surroundings, which cannot be understood by everyone, is considered their "mother tongue", the use of the mother tongue, thus, gets restricted. The mother tongue of minorities may not be the language that everyone understands. Besides, there is significance in recognising the people or caste that follows the standardized language as their mother tongue, as people often speak in a standardised language that they acquire by birth.

The standardisation of language has a significant role in the academic life of an individual. The standardisation of language severely affects the academic lives of minorities or lower castes in the world. The concept of standard language leads to the alienation of lower caste students from the universities in language proficiency (Kothari, 2013, p. 64). When individuals in a society do not have mastery of the highly valued ways of speaking, they do not benefit from the access to such proficiency often provided in prestigious schools, professions, or social groups (Ahearn, 2012, p. 271). Moreover, educational institutions are giving language lessons using examples from the standardised language varieties to teach the proper terminologies. There are students who have not come across these examples or the terms in their entire lives, and they consider these terminologies as "proper terms", but through this teaching method, the standardisation of language is occurring (Kothari, 2013, p. 69). More economic capital helps to get more symbolic capital, which can be in the form of mastery of the standard dialect or competence in multiple registers or languages. Ultimately, such mastery can often result in greater professional success and more economic capital (Ahearn, 2012, p. 271).

The study is conducted in Thachankunnu village, Calicut district, in northern Kerala. Kerala is historically known for its culture and traditions. It is renowned for its high literacy rate and health development, which is considered higher than any other region in India. Malayalam is the official language of Kerala; it has wide varieties. Peggy Mohan (2021) mentioned that "spoken Malayalam, even within the relatively small fort area of Cochin (Kochi) is like an 'ocean of idiolects', with every individual speaker just a little bit different, and maybe even changing over his lifetime, but with all the varieties mutually intelligible". The study explores the caste influence in the Malayalam language through language experiences and barriers that the students faced from educational institutions. Education institutions are the primary place where a person spends their early periods of the socialisation process. It is the place where a person usually learns a language other than their mother tongue. Moreover, schools teach languages from the beginning, like the alphabet and pronunciation, and this becomes a crucial time for the student to learn more about the language. Schools are the first public space where a person's use of language can be strongly influenced (Sruthi et al., 2018). The diversity in the classroom provides abundant chances to interact and come across multiple languages. These childhood memories and experiences can last forever. According to Althusser (2014), the language used in the classrooms has an authoritarian nature; therefore, the analysis of these languages will be the analysis of politics and dominances that existed in the society. The paper attempted to understand the caste embodiment in language by analysing the language experiences of three caste categories in a North Kerala village. The paper explored how the standardisation of language leads to linguistic inequality and how well the non-standardised language-speaking castes confront the situation without compromising their mother tongue.

2. Literature review

The concepts of language and caste systems are discussed in academic circles; however, in social spheres, they are often practised unknowingly. Most of the social interactions encompass language biases, which are reflected through the 'process of correction' by pointing out the 'standardised language'.

Mohan (2021) describes how the standardised Malayalam language evolved from Sanskrit. She explains how the Namboothiri Brahmins changed the Malayalam language and how the present language still bears a resemblance to Sanskrit. With usage, most of the terms that are taken from Sanskrit are the same as the Malayalam emerged terms for the speakers.

A recent study was conducted by Sruthi et al. (2018) to understand the dialect variations in the Malayalam language by examining the northern Kannur dialect. She focuses on the influence of the generational gap and



education on shaping the language. Education develops the notion of standard and non-standard language in people. Through education, people get more opportunities to interact with speakers of diverse dialects. Thus, educated individuals possess the ability to shift their dialect according to the context of interaction. Sruthi explains how certain dialects of a language can emerge as a separate language and how some dialects are often marginalised by the mainstream standardised language. There are two types of variables found in the dialect, such as variables between the dialects and within the dialect. The variation helps to acknowledge the uniqueness of each dialect. The distinct levels of dialects declare the language variation embodied in the Malayalam language. The variations within the dialect influence the age and educational qualifications of the speakers. The younger generation has variations in their dialect due to intermingling with the migrant communities. They have been exposed to different cultural groups, especially in educational institutions. Schools are the first public place that can profoundly influence a speaker's in their language use. Moreover, educated people have been getting more opportunities to learn the southern Kerala dialect than uneducated people.

Gomperz studied the language diversity and dialect differences of a relatively small, highly stratified North Indian village community in Khalapur (Gumperz, 1958). The author has chosen a sample of the most critical caste groups in the village and compared the linguistic differences with anthropological information. There are a few factors that maintain the caste system in the language. The old-fashioned non-standard language is primarily used by the untouchables or the backwards-class people, whereas the upper-class people speak the standardised language. The educated backward class imitates the upper-class language, but sometimes they restrict it to their original dialects. The imitation of the Sanskrit-influenced Malayalam language by the lower caste was strictly prohibited (Mohan, 2021). Gumperz distinguishes three forms of speech in the Hindi-speaking area. There are village dialects at the local level, regional dialects at the market centres and standard Hindi in the larger cities. The analysis is done on the village dialect, where the phonological variants are used to group the sub-dialects. Through this study, he asserts that even if the geographical location changes, the communities always speak in particular dialects. Language has an invisible link within the community itself.

Joyal Nayana has made a systematic attempt to formulate the propagation of caste prejudices through languages (Joyal, 2017). The dynamic language system means the speakers constantly alter the language by their belief system and culture. Specifically, cultural prejudices like 'Casteism' continue to promote discrimination through the language in the contemporary scenario. The caste system is multi-layered, and it has had its influence on vocabulary, usage, and phrases. The paper explains the profanities prevalent in the names of communities and lower castes and the commonly used phrases that are casteist but not identified by users. Besides, the native Indian languages carry the age-old caste system in them. The paper depicts the caste hierarchy in the language system of India.

The hierarchical structure of the language system alters according to the speakers' level. For example, though Hindi is considered a standardised language compared to other regional languages in India, it becomes a non-standardised language on a global level when compared to English. Kothari (2013) explains how English being an international language, helps to bring marginalised people into mainstream society. She attempts to explain the relationship between caste and the English language in her paper, "Caste in a Casteless Language? English as a language of Dalit expression." The paper depicts how English helped the Dalit community to express their views without any hesitation. Dalit writers choose to accept English as a target language, but it's so challenging to write in a language that doesn't have any memory about caste. She questioned the authenticity of Dalit individuals, communities, agency, recognition, and justice through the English language. It's a language of global dissemination that enables Dalit literature to be part of the public sphere in India in a human rights context.

The theoretical framework of the register has been included as the basis for the analysis of the paper. The register is a concept that denotes the tone or the way of speaking of a person. Individuals become familiar with the registers through the socialisation process pursued throughout their lives. However, every member of the linguistic community cannot be recognised as the register of the community equally; the recognition will vary from one to another with equal fluency in their speaking. These variations depend on the social background and distinct life course and trajectory of socialisation of the speaker; for instance, illiterate speakers will be unfamiliar with academic registers, and a youngster's register might be unfamiliar to older speakers (Agha, 2006, p.146).



The notion of the register contains an amalgamation of the analysis of linguistic attributes that are common in a text's variety and the analysis of the setting of the use of variety. Core linguistic features like pronouns and verbs have a significant function in the register. As a result, several linguistic features are common in a register because the linguistic purpose and the situational context of the texts are adopted from the register (Goulart et al., 2020, p. 437).

3. Method

The study followed an exploratory method in which the primary data was collected through a qualitative research method. The study involves case studies of 25 cases with in-depth interviews. The interviews were conducted among 25 cases within three caste categories as Scheduled Caste, Other Backward Class and General category in the Thachankunnu village in Calicut district, North Kerala. The samples were selected by considering the age group, education qualifications, and community to which they belonged. The case should be a student currently admitted to a college or higher secondary school in Kerala. The age group is from 18 to 35. The language medium used in the study is Malayalam.

The study was conducted in Thachankunnu, Calicut district in Kerala, through a comparative analysis of three caste groups: scheduled caste (SC), other backward class (OBC) and the general category (GEN). Thachankunnu is a village in Payyoli municipality on the northern side of Calicut district in the state of Kerala. The village has witnessed many developments that have helped the people of Thachankunnu (Kumaran, 2012, p. 41). Thachankunnu has a geographical speciality; it is located at the border of the Calicut and Kannur districts and has a distinct language identity. Thachankunnu is the place where SC/ST, OBC, and General communities live together with a rural identity. Although there were many Harijans in the Thachankunnu region, only a few were educated. Historically, Thachankunnu has witnessed caste discrimination. The upper castes sexually exploited girls from the lower castes. Specifically, a man from the upper caste can have any lower caste woman he desires. In Thachankunnu, a terrible incident occurred in 1945; a lower-caste woman committed suicide to prevent being raped by a man from the upper caste. The girl drowned herself in the river. She was the first woman who openly opposed caste discrimination (Kumaran, 2012, pp. 116–125).

4. Background

Kerala is a state located in the southern part of India. Kerala has a diversely cultural society. Even during the ancient and medieval periods, it was influenced by numerous non-Indian cultures. Classical languages such as Sanskrit, Greek, Latin, Hebrew, Chinese, Arabic, and Persian, among others, have at least one term for Kerala in their extensive vocabularies (Girish, 2003). The Malayalam language has influenced many other languages, such as Sanskrit, English, Hindi, and Arabic, as Kerala had trade connections with both internal and external parts of the country (Girish, 2017, p. 47). Malayalam is a part of the Dravidian language family, but it has a thick coat of Sanskrit. The Malayalam language got manipulated by mixing Sanskrit terms with the Dravidian language sound; therefore, those Sanskrit terms feel exactly like the terms that belong to the Malayalam language. The reflection of class in the language is found throughout history. Significantly, the language of peasants was considered a sign of social inferiority. Moreover, prominent languages such as Vedic and Sanskrit were enjoyed by the elite class; other languages, classified as Prakrit, were spoken by the lower class in India (Mohan, 2021).

In the past decades, the Dalits and other lower-class people had restricted listening to and learning Sanskrit; the attempts to learn were punished brutally. The Malayalam language has been influenced by the Sanskrit and Tamil vocabularies. The Sanskrit vocabulary was used by the upper class of the community, and Tamil has its origins in the lower class. Everything linked to Sanskrit can be located in the upper class, especially in the naming system, because the lower-class people did not have any right to use names that belonged to Sanskrit origins. The hierarchical disparities in the use of Malayalam vocabularies are found in every community, irrespective of religion (Joylal, 2017).

The migration highly affected the social and cultural backwardness of the Malabar region. The large migration to North Kerala transformed the cultural system of the region. The migrated community continuously reconstructed the cultural scenario of the region. Moreover, it led to the emergence of cultural hegemony among the native people (Sruthi et al. 2018). Peggy (2021) explains how the concept of standardised Malayalam influenced the speaker's life.



The migrant vernacular language-speaking communities gave up their mother tongue and accepted Malayalam. Later on, they began to write in Malayalam by focusing on tatsama (same as the original) Sanskrit terms, which they considered more rarefied in literature. However, the syntactic structure of Malayalam did not change; it remains in the neighbourhood of Tamil and other Dravidian languages (Mohan, 2021). So, since the majority's language dialect has always dominated the minority's language, societal pressure can be the main reason for the acceptance of a majoritarian language by the minority. Also, there is a chance of voluntary dependency on the majoritarian language by the minority (Girish, 2017, p.168). The linguistic pattern of the natives varied according to the areas. Dialect switching in the Malayalam language reveals the varieties of language that are particularly apt for situations (Sruthi et al. 2018). The invasion of Sanskrit came into Malayalam as a literature register. The expansion of the Malayalam literature among the vast Indian populations generated standard varieties within the region and connected Kerala with the large elite landmasses. It reflected variations that were going on elsewhere in India. The elites had been interacting with each other through Sanskrit, while other small communities were isolated and marginalised by their local dialects. Local power and dominance were accumulated by the literary elites through their command of language. The literary elites produced and addressed their problems and thoughts in the local power groups. While delivering the thoughts, they used the Malayalam language terms that are used in Sanskrit literature (Mohan, 2021). The power hierarchy of language continued through various media; the multilingualism of the language indirectly shows the linguistic status each dialect possesses. The speakers used the southern Kerala dialect in the public sphere and the northern Kannur dialect in the private sphere. The different varieties of Malayalam show the multilingualism embodied in Malayalam. The notion of a single Malayalam language should be reconstructed, and these varieties of Malayalam are considered impure versions of the original language. Nevertheless, the invisible nexus between the original and non-original languages depicts the linguistic status of these marginal varieties. These concepts of original and non-original are interlinked with the linguistic status of the Malayalam language because the varieties of Malayalam other than the Southern Kerala dialects are considered impure. The term "impure" can be correlated with the existence of caste in linguistics. External factors like migration and the role of educational institutions are leading to the deprivation of and dominance over native languages (Sruthi et al. 2018).

According to Althusser (2014), because the language used in classrooms has an authoritarian tone, analysing it will reveal the politics and dominance that are present in society. Gumperz (1958) points out that the non-standard (the standard is used to indicate majority speech) use of pronunciations is quite common among the untouchables. The people who used these old-fashioned pronunciations regularly were characterised as backward or ignorant (also concerning non-linguistic matters) in the community. Some of the more educated people from the untouchable group have begun to use higher castes' dialect features. However, they tend to relapse into their old dialect in unguarded situations. According to Gumperz, variants are considered uneducated speech and are used mainly by old-fashioned and untouchable groups. There is a clear geographical segregation among the housing residents of the village. Members of a particular caste tend to be grouped in housing clusters. Untouchable housing is mostly confined to separate sections. The ritual prohibitions and fear of incurring higher castes' displeasure might have discouraged untouchables from imitating the standard dialects. However, work or economic contacts, employer-employee contacts, vendor-customer contacts, informal contacts among children's playgroups, and adult inter-caste friendships might have assisted the variations in dialects. The author concludes that the linguistic differences represent social and not geographical groupings since the members of the same caste living in different sections of the village speak the same dialect (Gumperz, 1958). The caste system is followed by generations through generations. Language habits are frequently in a state of flux. Speech differences like those found in Khalapur may arise in the course of normal linguistic development. New linguistic forms are acquired, and old ones are dropped. The caste system and its disparities among communities are visible in the village study. Even if there are many direct forces to restrict upper-caste language in the village, the villagers are getting more standardised dialects through indirect conversations. The various forms of Hindi and its prevalence in the caste system can be compared to variations in the Malayalam language and the reflection of the caste system (Joylal, 2017).

5. Findings

The in-depth interview was conducted on people from three categories, namely, Scheduled Caste, Other Backward Class, and General Category. The questions are mainly focused on language-related experiences in educational institutions. From the other backward caste, a few students from Islam and the Hindu religion responded.



The participants from the Hindu religion have different educational experiences. In OBC-Hindu, one of the participants was studying in an institute that was located in a nearby district. They had the experience of getting insulted by indicating specific terms from their mother tongue; for instance, they were mocked for using the term "Keenj Paanj Poi," which means to run away. Moreover, he/s had not felt any discrimination from the institute directly other than insulting their mother tongue in general. He/s has not lost any opportunity due to a lack of Malayalam language proficiency because the participant knows how to talk in the standard Malayalam language too. The participant feels most comfortable while talking in their mother tongue; however, the participant from the OBC-Hindu category mentioned that he/s feels inferior when talking to people from the standard Malayalam community. He/s was always concerned about her/ his dignity loss while speaking in their mother tongue in front of people who were outside of the linguistic community. The participant from the OBC-Hindu category believes that personal status has a relationship with their language. Moreover, participants from OBC-Hindu groups think that standard Malayalam can help as a medium to communicate with everyone. One of the participants from the OBC-Hindu category who has been studying English literature as a major suggested that "status recognition through language should be eradicated." Most of the OBC-Hindu category responded that they do not have any difficulty communicating in Malayalam at the institutions. They found few variations in the slang between their hometown and college. The mother tongue has more speed while talking compared to the academic institute's language. The participants from the OBC-Hindu category who have been studying outside of the district said that most of their professors were from the native locality of the college. So, they always speak their mother tongue in the classroom. Moreover, they said that people always identify their mother tongue by their previous experience of talking with people who have that particular mother tongue. One of the participants stated that "language could give an indication of their community because the terms and tone of the language have a relationship with the rituals and beliefs which they follow" they mentioned the folk songs and their language as examples of the language connection.

Many of the participants from OBC-Hindu recall no experience of being insulted and discriminated against due to their mother tongue from academic institutions and have not even lost any opportunities due to the lack of proficiency in the Malayalam language. Some of them have responded that the mother tongue has a significant role in our life; it gives an identity and helps to express one's feelings to the fullest, whereas it does not give any career opportunities. While talking in their mother tongue, they always bear a fear in mind about whether the audience would be able to understand the information conveyed precisely. However, speaking Malayalam in the participant's locality give space and confidence. Ten participants from OBC-Hindu responded that they believe in the standard Malayalam language because following that has given better marks in the examination. Few of them noticed that they used to get lesser marks in examinations whenever non-standard language was used. However, the mother tongue has been entertained by the peer groups, which is considered an advantage of the language because, with this dialect, the student could make others laugh with the humour that the dialect possesses. Institute authorities often ask the local language-speaking students to improve their language. Nevertheless, Participants from OBC-Hindu category mentioned that they could handle both local slang and 'standard' textbook language with ease. The knowledge of local dialect gives them an upper hand in cultural events such as folk songs. Adithya from OBC-Hindu had organised folk dance and folk songs in her mother tongue in their school programs. They observed dialect variations for terms among participants' peer groups in college. People often identify Adithya's native place from the way she speaks. People pointed out that her dialect is somewhat similar to the Muslim dialect, even though her family never restricted the usage of the mother tongue at school. Adithya mentioned that she lives in an area which is surrounded by a Muslim community. After completing primary education in a regional school where the local dialect is commonly used by everyone, Adithya did not feel much difficulty to use mother tongue in the school.

The participants in OBC Muslim had various experiences regarding their mother tongue. One of the participants studied in both regional and central schools, and she did not feel much difficulty speaking in Malayalam as she had mixed slang. However, she noticed that some of her friends from Kottayam (a southern district in Kerala) always said that they have 'original' Malayalam. She shared an experience of being repeatedly insulted by her friends because of using a colloquial word in a program. Lastly, the participant asserted that "every language has different variations."

Another Participant from the same category responded that she studied in English medium- the fight was a different school, so she/he was scared to participate in any program because of a lack of English language proficiency.



One of the participants from the OBC-Muslim category responded that "we should have a standard Malayalam concept, and we have to speak in that way, but colloquial language is more interesting". The participant continued by saying, "Muslims have bad language compared to others". A participant from the OBC-Muslim category whose parents were teachers restricted him from using colloquial slang. He has been practising language shift with both colloquial slang and 'standard Malayalam' to avoid difficulties. At the end of the interview, the participant said that "I am confident that there is no bad in my language." One of the participants from the same category argued that "publishers are the people who support academic language." Moreover, "the dialect used in Malayalam textbooks are 'non-standardised' Malayalam, but that language is not allowed in the examination".

One participant from the OBC Muslim category had many experiences of being insulted over the mother tongue. The participant studied in a college which was far from her/his home town. Many of my college mates laughed at the mother tongue and considered the language as a joke. Moreover, whenever a participant in general talks and participates in discussions, the other participants always laugh. These experiences challenged the participant to talk more in a gentle way that others considered perfect. The participant always wanted to engage in many programs conducted by the college. However, the participant did not have confidence in the mother tongue to speak in front of a crowd. Furthermore, one of her/his professors in the academic institution denied her/his participation in an inter-college debate by saying, "you will talk in your Malabar Muslim style, which will affect the reputation of the college and department". The participant usually writes poems to reduce mental stress. Writing English poems has not given the participant the same mental relief that Malayalam poems give (mother tongue). The participant suggested that every minority should learn how to talk in standard Malayalam to resist the upper hand over them in their academic career. The people who were surrounded by the college locality could identify the city of the participant through their mother tongue. When the peers learnt the participant's hometown, they began to call the participant by adding the home town as the last name. This participant's family did not bother about the language they used in schools and college because there were no changes occurred in the way they talked.

Two of the participants had a bachelor's in Sociology, and some of the courses allowed them to talk in their mother tongue in the classroom and in other presentations as well. There was a radio team to conduct and implement a radio facility in the school every Friday. Through this radio, they organised many events in the mother tongue as this school was in the home town.

In the scheduled caste part, all of the participants are from the Hindu religion. Most of them expressed their views on language as they had the experience of being mocked. One participant had engaged in a research program at the academic institution wherein he/s had to interview some people for data collection. At that time, one professor sarcastically commented on improving the language. The professor refused to accept his/her dialect and asked not to talk because he/s was not able to understand the language. Faculty also pointed out that his/her language is not proper to be used in the outside world.

Few participants from the SC category always tried to understand other person's feelings and never attempted to mock anyone based on their way of talking. Some of the participants feel that they do not even need this mother tongue anymore due to the humiliation that they had to bear consequences. Aswathi from SC responded that many people are purposefully using the standard language in an attempt to show off. Moreover, she admits that the knowledge of the standard language will help in getting a job easily within the country or abroad. They recall the incident where people commented on her/his slang as mellifluous. Two participants from SC proudly state that their mother tongue is the language used in the Thira festival of Kerala. The local usage of words viz you (inj) and me (njan) caused a lot of confusion among colleagues due to the lack of perception of the idea conveyed said by one SC category student who has been studying in another district.

A few participants were ridiculed by people saying that they lacked clarity in the language usage. However, some of them didn't lose any opportunities due to language proficiency, even though they had negative experiences due to mother tongue usage. People usually laugh at their dialect, but they do not feel the need to change her/his mother tongue. Reshma from SC argued that "why should I change my identity? Standard Malayalam language is an integral part of contemporary society. If there is no concept such as standard language, we could have communicated in our own way without any hesitation." Few participants responded towards the speciality of their dialect, as when speaking, it has more speed than other dialects. Jinsi said that her educational institution allowed



them to talk in their mother tongue. Most of the participants responded that people always identified the locality and community from their dialect.

In the general category, most of the participants responded that they did not have any experiences of discrimination in the context of language. One participant responded that based on the difficult experiences of friends, he/she always tried to avoid the situation of getting mocked based on dialect. He/she did not lose any opportunities due to mother tongue issues, but whatever was lost was due to a lack of confidence. Unni states that "Mother tongue has a feeling which gives affection to people in the most convenient language I have ever used". Few participants responded towards the question "do you believe in standard malayalam?" as "Standard Malayalam language will help to communicate easily for official or formal conversations". Some participants think that people might laugh when they listen to her/his mother tongue. Most of the participants were ignorant about the acceptance of their mother tongue in academic institutions. As most of the participants knew how to manage situations well, they did not get many bitter experiences. Deepa responded about the encouragement of mother tongue in the educational institute as the special program for Malayalees in the academic institution encouraged them to actively organise and participate in the cultural program. She was studying in a college that has Kannada as the official language, where people know a little bit of Malayalam as well. Moreover, people were able to identify her district but not her locality. Her family did not restrict the use of the local dialect, but often times they made fun of the way she/he speaks.

In contrast to other participants' responses, Anju from the general category faced a lot of discrimination from academic institutions. She has migrated to a new village from another village in the same district. One of her teachers from other districts once pitied her language by saying, "what a language you have"-an insult. She has even lost her job due to the slang, even though she had managed to qualify for the final round of selections with good scores. Even after facing these bitter experiences, she never felt the need to change her mother tongue dialect. Whenever any guests visited her college, the students used to get an order from institute authorities not to talk in the local language in front of them. Mother tongue always helped to reduce the feeling of being less privileged in language proficiency in the home town. When it comes to the standard language, people recognise or assume the background of the person, and it often leads to prejudice and, in the worst-case, discrimination. Anju has participated in Malayalam essay and story writing competitions which she felt supported by her mother tongue in school. Anju's family members always tell her to talk gently to cousins and relatives instead of using local dialects. Moreover, her teachers always tell her to use the standard Malayalam language in workplaces and in job places. "No one has the right to question our language; my language is my right," Anju stated firmly.

6. Analysis and discussion

Register and Dialects are the important terms used in the analysis. The analysis of the paper is undertaken through the theoretical framework of Register and the Dialect as a supporting factor to differentiate caste groups based on language; it is important to define terms in the context of this study. According to Ferguson, Dialect is a form of language used by "a group that operates regularly in a society as a functional element". Specifically, this form of language "develop[s] identifying markers... different from the language of other social groups" (Ferguson, 1994, p. 19). The paper explored how the standardisation of language leads to linguistic inequality and how well the non-standardised language-speaking castes confront the situation without compromising their mother tongue.

Through the language experience of different caste groups, the study specifically looks at how the dialect variations of each caste group trace back to their caste identity in a village.

The linguistic caste identity of the speaker is defined through the concept of Register. The register is a concept that denotes the tone or the way of speaking of a person. Individuals are familiar with the registers through the socialisation process pursued throughout their life. However, every member of the linguistic community cannot be recognised as the register of the community equally; the recognition will be varied from one to another with equal fluency in their speaking. These variations depend on the social background, distinct life course and trajectory of socialisation of the speaker; for instance, the illiterate speakers will be unfamiliar with the academic registers, and the youngster's register might be unfamiliar to older speakers (Agha, 2006, p.146). The notion of the register contains the amalgamation of analysis of linguistic attributes that are common in a text variety and the analysis of the setting of the use of variety. Core linguistic features like pronouns and verbs have a significant function in the register. As a



result, several linguistic features are common in a register because the linguistic purpose and the situational context of the texts are adopted from the register (Goulart et al., 2020, p. 437).

In using a social dialect, a speaker refers back to the social group to which s/he belongs. In using a social register, however, the speaker refers back to the social stereotypes of that group. As such, the use of the term register allows for a description of a linguistic code that carries with it and is used to portray a unique set of cultural values. Thus, in the current research, the term register will be used to define the style used by Other Backward Castes, Scheduled Castes and General caste groups to identify with and establish caste-specific language experience in academic institutions. The language experience in the educational institution is analysed through a few factors, such as insult, locality, perception, exclusion, inclusion, opportunity, resistance and family background.

The language experience of every individual varies according to social background, language proficiency and location. The experience of being insulted through language was addressed in various ways by the three caste groups. The experience of OBC Hindu, Muslim and SC says that people tried to identify our community identity through the way they speak.

“ people mocked me by indicating specific term ‘keenj paanj poi’”- an OBC Hindu student

“language could give an indication of their community because the terms and tone of the language have a relationship with the rituals and beliefs which they follow”- an SC student

Most of the SC participants responded that people identified their community through their dialect. These responses indicate that the historically identified common features or usages of a linguistic community will be remembered even if the community begins to speak in a standard manner. Moreover, when a backward community attempts to merge their identity with a privileged community, the other communities always remind them about their historical status or position in society to emphasise they are from a minority background, even if they try to talk in the standard language (Shruti et al., 2018, p.61).

All the caste groups responded to the question of the speciality of language by saying there is a humour element in their dialect that can make people laugh. However, some of the OBC Muslims responded that they could not identify whether this laugh was a speciality of language or an insult. But the SC category responded that people usually laugh at their dialect, but they did not feel the need to change her/his mother tongue. The recognition of insults and linguistic speciality varies with the context of the conversation and the identity of the speaker. It can be an invisible insult to the dialect, too, which the speakers could not identify.

The OBC Hindu and General categories had the capacity to tackle being insulted through language shift. They have language proficiency in both standardized dialects and local dialects. In the General category, most of them avoided using the local dialect in the institution deliberately to avoid getting mocked by others. In this village, other backward castes and general categories always keep a binary between the public and private spheres. They usually shift their language dialect according to the sphere they are located in, and the degree of formality expressed through the language shift from private to public and vice versa (Shruti et al., 2018, p.61). The concept of ‘us and other’ got prevalent among the linguistic communities because the minorities try to speak in their mother tongue in the village areas, which gives a feeling of ‘us’ and speak standard Malayalam language in educational institutions and public places which gives the feeling of ‘other’. OBC Hindus were conscious about their personal status of them when speaking to other standard dialect speakers. The linguistic ‘social tensions’ emerge when a person thinks about the personal status of the speaker through their mother tongue (Gumperz, 1958, p.668). Specifically, vernacular language-speaking people get worried about their status perceived by others when they communicate with standard language speakers. Therefore, minorities always shift their language dialect depending upon the context.

The concept of locality has a significant role in the language experience of people. The educational institutions accept the local dialect of the village where the institution is located. For instance, speaking Payyoli native slang in Payyoli High school is considered normal. Some professors usually teach in the local dialect, which is acceptable by the authorities of the institute because the language dialect of the professor and the language used in the local area of the institute are the same. When the majority speaks in a language which has connected to the geographical area, then the majority becomes ‘normal’.



The students who have studied both regional and central schools found less difficulty in language shift. But they come across the next level of language understanding; for example, classmates who are from Kottayam (a southern district in Kerala) always say that they have 'original' Malayalam. When the locality varies, the language experience and perception differ. Language has the capacity to trace back to where you live.

Similarly, Aditya from OBC Hindu responded that people commented on her dialect has a Muslim touch and she is living in a place that is surrounded by a Muslim community. The language experience shows that the language travels from community to community.

In the context of locality, one participant in the General category who migrated from another locality faced many difficulties due to a lack of language proficiency. At the local level, there are village dialects, which vary from one village to another (Gumperz, 1958, p.669). The General category participant got eliminated from a job opportunity because of their Malayalam language proficiency. This evidence confirms that even when a person belongs to the upper caste section with vernacular language, they can get negative impacts on their academic career based on their language proficiency. The caste privileges also have dependencies on factors such as the economy and social attributes like language. If a person is not able to fulfil one of these factors in the privilege section, the opportunities will get diminished. In this case, the general category person who got failed the interview shows that in some cases, the caste representation can be diminished if they fail to show their identity in their language.

In the context of language experience at the family level, the General category family members restricted their younger generation from speaking in their mother tongue in front of cousins because the mother tongue of youths got mixed with the other communities' dialects through continuous interaction. "What is more alarming is that in many instances, children are discouraged and at times punished for using their mother tongues even at home" (Hany Babu, 2017, p.117). When speaking in a dominant regional language, the person gets higher dignity based on language, but when a dominant caste person speaks in a vernacular lower standard language, they fear losing their dignity in the community.

The participants shared the experience of language exclusion in the academic space and its impact.

OBC Muslim R: "publishers are the people who support academic language." Moreover, "the dialect used in Malayalam textbooks are 'non-standardised' Malayalam, but that language is not allowed in the examination".

OBC-Muslim: one of my professors in the academic institution denied my participation in an inter-college debate by saying, "you will talk in your Malabar Muslim style, which will affect the reputation of the college and department".

General category R: Whenever any guests visit the college, the students used to get an order from institute authorities not to talk in the local language in front of them.

The written curriculum and the hidden teaching methods, directly and indirectly, support the concept of standardisation of language. It is not only making the minority struggle with the dialects, it also produces a notion of good and bad languages in their minds. Moreover, this approach forces minorities to follow the standardized language to excel in academics.

Education, whether in English or the vernacular, cultivates elitism, and caste is one of the key constituents of elitism in India. The majority of the participants learned about standard and non-standard language in schools. However, in order to achieve the previous goal, each individual should have the opportunity to flourish completely in the mother tongue (Hanybabu, 2017, p.118). The register is a concept that denotes the tone or the way of speaking of a person. Individuals are familiar with the registers through the socialisation process pursued throughout their life journey. However, every member of the linguistic community cannot be recognised by the register of the community equally; the recognition will be varied from one to another with equal fluency in their speaking. These variations depend on the social background, distinct life course and trajectory of socialisation of the speaker. For instance, "illiterate speakers will be unfamiliar with the academic registers, and the youngster's register might be unfamiliar to older speakers" (Agha, 2006, p.146). The linguistic experience of various communities in a village shows that each member of the society will have a distinct way of speaking. "Differences of register competence are thus often linked to asymmetries of power, socioeconomic class, position within hierarchies, and the like" (Agha, 2006, p.146). The dialect of a person is associated with the location, caste, religion, economic background of the family



and education. By considering the discriminated experiences of the migrated general category members compared to the non-migrated general category members, both of them belonged to the upper caste with high command over the economy. Still, one of them struggled due to the language dialect, which is closely interconnected with the village. This shows that when the upper caste person talks in a lower standard language, the register gets prevalent. Generally, people think that upper caste people will get familiar with the caste dialect in their communication. Nevertheless, their village dialect may overpower the caste factor and influence their register. The register is a process that evolves over time through social interactions and knowledge acquisition.

The participants have various perceptions regarding their mother tongue and standard Malayalam. Among OBC Hindus, Some of them have responded that the mother tongue has a significant role in our life; it gives an identity and helps to express one's feelings to the fullest, whereas it does not give any career opportunities. OBC-Muslim category responded that "we should have a standard Malayalam concept, and we have to speak in that way, but colloquial language is more interesting". The participant continued by saying, "Muslims have bad language compared to others". "I am confident that there is no bad in my language."

Few participants from the SC category always tried to understand other person's feelings and never attempted to mock anyone based on their way of talking. Aswathi from SC responded that "many people are purposefully using the standard language in an attempt to show off". Reshma from SC argued that "why should I change my identity? Standard Malayalam language is an integral part of contemporary society. If there is no concept such as standard language, we could have communicated in our own way without any hesitation." Few participants responded towards the specialty of their dialect as when speaking it has more speed than other dialects.

From General category Unni states that "Mother tongue has a feeling which gives affection to people in the most convenient language I have ever used". Few participants responded towards the question of "do you believe in standard Malayalam?" as "Standard Malayalam language will help to communicate easily for official or formal conversations".

One of the participants says that "teachers always tell to use the standard Malayalam language in workplaces and in job places, No one has the right to question our language, my language is my right,".

Moreover, the students from the OBC Hindu category believe in the standardised Malayalam language by stating that "it gives better marks in the examination and the mother tongue will not offer any career opportunity". As Althusser argued, the education institutes not only teach the skills, it also gives language proficiency to the ruling class and helps to achieve a higher position in the professional world but the working class remains the same (Althusser, 2014).

In Kerala, until recently, people had been using a kind of 7 languages with overt caste hierarchical markers. The speech variety with these overt caste hierarchical markers may be described as 'castelect'. Due to the possibility of social mobility available through education, an individual can enter any social class except caste. In this sense, caste still has a significant role to play in present-day Kerala society. However, where there is no manifest social change in relation to caste identity and hierarchy, there is really no impact of education, etc. (Girish, 2003).

The language shift according to 'public' and 'private' spaces emphasises that the language and the land where it is spoken are intricately bounded as if one can never separate both of them "(Shruti et al., 2018, p.52). In the OBC category, Hindu and Muslim participants have different coping mechanisms against language exclusion. In the Hindu community, they are experts in the language shift, and it helped them to reduce the conflicts regarding language proficiency in the institutions. Among Muslims, many of them did not oppose or react to the exclusion regarding language proficiency as they normalised their language as a low-standard one. In contrast, there are few Muslims who always attempted to normalise their language identity in front of others by stating, "my language is my identity". Many linguistic communities indicated that the language of OBC Hindus from the village has some similarities with the Muslim dialects of the area. This can be due to the interrelated and mixed settlement of the village. SC/ST community members had challenging experiences compared to any other categories. Most of their experiences forced them to change their language. However, they always resisted the upper hand over their language by arguing that their language is their identity. In the general category, the community members shared different experiences and perspectives. One participant did not struggle due to her mother tongue as he/s always speaks in either standard Malayalam or English in most situations. "In complex societies, where no fluent speaker of the



language fully commands more than a few of its registers, the register range of a person may influence the range of social activities in which that person is entitled to participate" (Agha, 2006, p. 146). People who participate in social activities and interact with a variety of people have a better chance of learning different languages. They can build numerous registers as a result of these exposures, and this ability allows them to handle any situation by switching languages.

The general category members and OBC Muslims from the village had similar experiences because most of their professors restricted them from speaking their mother tongue in the classrooms.

The monolingual and culturally homogenous Kerala state is a result of the idea of Aikyakeralam. The concept of uniformity through the common culture and common language is a construction of specific socio-political groups. The cultural homogeneity and the monolithic 'Malayali' identity can be considered a savarna ideology (Devika, 2007, p. 10). It is not only a loss of cultural diversity but also leads to the hegemony of the regional elite (Hany Babu, 2017, p.115). Standardisation is a concept related to the caste system. Because "Standardisation can be described as a category of prestige, and standard varieties have occurred with highest prestige varieties that are characterised by the highest degree of uniformity" (Milroy, 2001, p. 532). However, many of the varieties in the Malayalam language play an essential role in their folk arts and culture. Most of these folk dances and songs complete the diverse culture and identity of Kerala. Without the 'Theyyam, Thira and folk songs, Kerala cannot depict its complete picture. And these cultural art forms are practised in a non-standard Malayalam language. So, "any minority residing in the territory of India or any part thereof having a distinct language and script shall be entitled to have primary education imparted to its children through the medium of that language and script in case of a substantial number of such students being available" (Hany Babu, 2017, p.113). The compilation of the language varieties in the academic syllabus will prevent the degradation of the mother tongue and linguistic inequality. Giving recognition to every dialect can remove the academic barriers that minorities experience. Moreover, the negative impacts due to the differentiation of language should be taken care of by every student and teacher in the academic space. There should be an orientation session for the students indicating the language barriers and discrimination for the betterment of their personality and social life.

7. Conclusion

Every language in the world has its own significance and speciality; each community and every speaker of the community have relevance in language. Depending on their social background, level of language skill, and geographic location, each person has a different language experience. The three caste groups tackled the issue of experiencing linguistic insults in varied ways. The OBC Hindu, Muslim, and SC experiences indicate that individuals have made an effort to discern our community's identity from the way they talk. Language competence visualises many other identities of the speaker, such as locality, tone and community. These variables show the identity status of the speaker through which deriving the caste identity can be possible. Laughing at a particular dialect can not only consider the humour speciality of the dialect but can also be a way of insulting the dialect indirectly. The capacity to recognise the meaning of laughter is a significant part of agitating against linguistic disparities. The language-shifting capacity by considering the context of minorities can be one of the ways in which they adjust to the standardisation of language. Language shift can also be a way of resistance towards the standardisation of language in which the speakers utilise the register of each dialect without compromising the mother tongue. The linguistic difficulty of the higher caste is to visible the caste identity through the language; when they fail to be in the linguistic group, the community tries to push the speaker out of the caste identity by removing the opportunities they can avail through the caste.

The academic institutes show linguistic disparities through the curriculum and non-curriculum activities with the support of the standardisation of language. These practices impart good and bad language perceptions to the learners. Moreover, a lack of competence in the standardised language restricts the vernacular speakers from availing the fullest experiences of the educational institution. However, there are few opportunities related to the mother tongue which provide an inclusive space to minorities. Specifically, the vernacular language-speaking students could participate in the folk songs competition in educational institutions with ease. It demonstrated the influence of language in their folk arts and rituals. The significance of the mother tongue in the social role and status is identified. Moreover, the bias related to caste was revealed through the experiences of SC/ST, OBC and the general category



of the village. The causes and impacts of language discrimination are analysed through the direct experiences of the participants from educational institutions. The loss of job opportunities and class participation is evidence of language-based discrimination. Finally, how the caste is reflected in the Malayalam language is explained through the standardisation of language. Identification of the value of mother tongue, language diversity and resisting the way it gets deprived have a significant role in which we can achieve language uniformity.

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Conflict of interest

The Author declare no conflict of interest including any financial or personal relationships with other people regarding the submitted work.

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