



# ATTITUDES OF KASABA TRIBE TOWARDS THEIR MOTHER TONGUE

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## Abstract

Kasaba is a tribal community living in the Nilgiris. It has got its own linguistic system and it has been studied by many linguists viz. Zvelebil, K (1971) Shanmugam S.V (1974) Chidambaranathan Pillai (1976) and so on. But, in modern days, the language of Kasaba tribe gets changed because of the impact of urbanization, modernization, social changes and modern communication network. That leads to loss of age old linguistic entities and its originality: So, Kasaba language has to be studied sociolinguistically, for protecting and preserving it as no effort in this regard it has been carried out so far.

This paper, thus, tries to understand the sociology of Kasaba language, the attitudes of Kasaba tribes towards their mother tongue, the linguistic situation prevail in their living environments (both in settlement and in main-stream region), their understanding over their language and the level of bilingual competence they have in their mother tongue, and regional language (Tamil). Around 40 informants representing some social unvariables viz. gender, age, education and floatingness, have been approached and their views have been elicited and through a questionnaire the corpus have been analysed qualitatively and quantitatively, for drawing inferences.

**Key words:** Attitude, Bilingual, Linguistic situation, Competence, Qualitative, Quantitative

## Introduction

The Nilgiris is an abode of many minor linguistic communities such as Toda. Kota Badaga, Irula, Kasaba etc. They live, in harmony, along with the people of regional language called Tamil. The indigenous linguistic communities protecting their age old identity from the external impact, lead their domestic and public lives; being mostly as bilinguals and in some cases as multilinguals (mother tongue, Tamil, and other indigenous languages.) Their communication pattern is something unique which opens up avenue for academic research of social relevance.

Kasaba is one such linguistic community in the Nilgiris of Tamil nadu. They live in the Masinagudi area in the Kudalar division of the Nilgiris District. According to 2001 census, around 900 Kasabas live in various settlements of the Kudalar division of the Nilgiris. They are thick-lipped and sharp-eyed with curled hair and black complexion. They use a non-literary Dravidian language, which has been studied by many linguistics like Chidamparanathan Pillai (1976), Basu (1971), Zvelebil, K. (1973), Shanmugam, S.V. (1974), and Francis (1808). Francis designates that Irula; another tribal language of the Nilgiris, of Masinagudi as Kasaba language. Zvelebil considers Kasaba as another dialect of Irula. S.V. Shanmugam refutes the stance of Zvelebil with ample empirical evidences in the aspect of phonological elements and proves that Kasabsa is a separate language. Chidamparanathan Pillai, through his two research publications viz., 1. Kasaba phonology with vocabulary, 2. A Grammar of the Kasaba language, establishes a fact that Kasaba is a separate language.

Thus, the Kasaba language, because of the urbanization and modernization, occurred in their living environment due to globalization, is at the threat of endangerment, relinquishing its idiosyncratic identity. That will gradually lead to linguocides resulting to loss of traditional wisdom, knowledge, culture, civilization etc. stored in their linguistic elements. It is, therefore, at this context, very much imperative to protect their language by understanding the ground reality of their linguistic situation, prevailing at their living places. By studying these issues through a scientific linguistic study, certain corrective mechanisms suitable to this particular ground reality, can be suggested to the government for protecting, promoting minor languages and in order to bring them to mingle with mainstream people, without scarifying their cultural and linguistic identities.

### **Sociolinguistic studies**

Over the last seven decades, exhaustive Sociolinguistic studies on the minor linguistic communities have not been carried out. However, Sociolinguistic studies on linguistic minorities have been dominated by two different linguistic research traditions. The first one began with the work of Weinreich (1953) on Language in Contact and was subsequently developed by Ferguson (1959) and Fishman (1967 and 1972). For them, the main concern was on accounting for functional differentiations of minority Languages.

The second, but more recent tradition, began with the works of Gumperz (1971) and Gal (1979). In this tradition, emphasis is on the social and linguistic processes operating at the micro-level of social intercourse and conversational interaction. Weinreich (1953) states that the affected language assumes a different structural type. Pandit (1972) has worked on Saurashtri spoken in Tamilnadu and says that they maintain their language in core domain. Bayer (1986) has studied the dynamics of language maintenance among linguistic minorities, taking a case of Tamil community in Bangalore. Sam Mohan Lal (1986) has also studied the Tamil minorities in Bangalore in terms of convergence between Tamil and Kannada. Southworth (1974 and 1978) and Smith (1979) say that it is quite nature that impact of regional language over the minor language and minority language and vice-versa in their daytoday linguistic behavior. Karunakaran (1980) says that the problems of linguistic minorities have not been studied adequately, but certain attempts have been made here and there. But,

however it is inferred that though minority language have been studied with a Sociolinguistic perspective, no such study has been made on Kasaba language.

### **Linguistic Attitude**

The theory of the attitudes towards language postulates that an act of speech is not simply the restore to a system of signs or rules or its use in order to communicate, but that it also implies taking up a position towards language itself. According to Garvin and Mathiot (1968) there are three characteristics of language attitudes, namely, language loyalty, language pride and awareness of the norm. Language loyalty is an attitude that encourages the speakers of language to maintain their language viability from the adverse impact of another language. Attitudes formation theories suggest that perhaps we do what benefits us (Functional theory) or many of our past experience have taught us how to act (Learning theories) or it might just be an attempt to restore harmony to two opposing truths that are held (cognitive dissonance theory). Attitudes is the collection of benefits, prejudices, association, and optional associations and opening people have towards a language, these attitudes can be positive, negative or natural and since they play crucial role in shaping language use, communication patterns and interactions with in several areas such as Sociolinguistics, Social Psychology and Education. This type of attitudes studies help in identifying how people of language group view the personal character and social status of speakers of another language and how they form association about other languages. Language attitudes are defined as set of benefits, feelings, and behavioural intentions towards different languages. Attitudes consists three components. Affective component feeling, emotion, (response and action) and cognitive comprehension (belief or evaluation) Behavioral component.

### **Linguistic attitudes of Kasaba tribes**

In order to understand the attitudes of Kasaba tribes towards their mother tongue, certain questions related to their language, language use, their competence in their language, and in other language, sociology of language, etc., have been raised to the native Kasaba tribes living in the Nilgiris. For those questions, they answered aptly. Those answers have been qualitatively and critically analysed applying basic statistics and inferences have been drawn and discussed in detail.

For understanding the attitudes of Kasaba language, certain questions have been asked to the informants. The informants selected for this study represent certain social variables viz. Gender, Age, Education and floating, Forty informants have been randomly selected so as to give equal importance to each variable chosen, That is, ten informants from each variable and in total 40 informants have been selected. Their views have been quantified across those variable and inference have been given.

For studying the sociology of Kasaba language, some questions have been posed. The question “Which language you speak most often?” has been answered by the informants as follows

		Kasaba	Tamil
Gender	Male:	40%	60%
	Female:	70%	30%
Age	Young:	20%	80%
	Old	65%	35%
Education	Educated:	30%	70%
	Uneducated	67%	33%
Floating	Floating	34%	66%
	Unfloating	80%	20%

It is observed that majority of Kasaba tribes are bilinguals. They know their mother tongue and Tamil language which is state as well as regional language and which serves a lingua – Franca for cross-tribal communication network in the Nilgris when in more than six tribal communicates are living. So, in order to do some socialization process, out of their respective settlements, they need to know the Tamil language. By a close seruting of the statistics, it is inferred that the female, old, uneducated and unfloating Kasaba tribal people use their mother tongue Kasaba most often whereas their counterpart’s male, young, educated and floating Kasaba tribal people use Tamil language most often. It shows a fact that the sociolinguistic behavior of male, young, educated and floating Kasaba tribal people is different from that of female, uneducated old and unfloating Kasaba tribal propel. It otherwise implies that their competence will also vary. The competence level of speaker in a language will decide the frequency of languageuse. The greater the competence in a language is higher quantum in using that language in different domains which eventually enhances the competence in that language further. So, bilingual competence of male, educated, young and floating Kasaba tribal people is more than that of the female, uneducated, old and unfloating Kasaba tribal people.

The language use in different contexts has also been observed with the informants chosen. It presents the following facts.

In sociolinguistics, the term domains is used usually to denote the “social context of interaction” Domain is an area of human activity in which one particular speech variety or combination of several varieties is regularly used. A domain can be considered as a group related to social settings. Speech communities are made up of a number of domains which organize and define social life.

The first scholar who proposed domain is Schmidt Rohr in 1932. It was then developed by Fishman. Barber and Barker formulated domains at level of socio – psychological analysis. There are some important domains. They are work place, play group, Informal, Formal, inteimate and intergroup especially family,

friends, siblings etc. In informal domain, the speakers are closely and emotionally attached each others. So, the speakers use informal kind of language. But in formal domain, speakers are not closely attached and there is no room for emotion. For example, the relation between strangers, teacher – student. Intimate domain, there is less intimacy in formal relationship and high intimacy in informal relations or groups. Inter groups are related to informal group relations as in class – groups Fishman states that the factors which influence the concept and domain are Topic, role- relation and place. These three factors together make up a set and topical domains. For example, a common domain is home which is place. The role- relationship (people involved in speech events) associated with the home which includes family members (mother, father) and ability . There are suitable set and topics. Geert says that social relationship between speaker and listener affects the language style. Wardaugh states the speakers apply different styles of speaking.

So, the factors that influence a domain are topic, role-relation and setting or place, people meet several domains and use different topics and language styles in different domains according to their roles. The following are the domains of language choice by bilingual Kasaba tribes.

		Informal	Formal	Intimate	Intergroup	Workplace	Play group
Gender	Male	Kasaba	Tamil	Kasaba	Kasaba	Tamil	Tamil
	Female	kasaba	kasaba	kasaba	kasaba	Tamil	Tamil
Age	Young	Tamil	Tamil	kasaba	Tamil	Tamil	Tamil
	Old	kasaba	kasaba	kasaba	kasaba	kasaba	Kasaba
Educated	Educated	kasaba	Tamil	kasaba	kasaba	Tami	Tamil
	uneducated	kasaba	kasaba	kasaba	kasaba	Tamil	Tamil
Floating	Floating	Tamil	Tamil	Tamil	Tamil	Tamil	Tamil
	Unfloating	Kasaba	Tamil	Kasaba	kasaba	Tamil	Tamil

By analyzing the above statistics, it is inferred that majority of the Kasaba tribes, being bilinguals, use Tamil mostly in formal domain of language use and similarly, in workplaces or of their settlement areas, avail Tamil language .However, in intergroup communication, the Kasaba tribes invariably use Kasaba language. The same trend also prevails in intimate zone. In play ground too, Tamil is being used by the Kasaba tribes.

While making comparison across different social variables selected, In majority of the domains of language use, male, young, educated and floating population of Kasaba tribal community make use of Tamil . It is not because of the lack of competence in their mother tongue Kasaba, rather because of good command of Tamil the Kasaba tribes possess . Moreover, this type of language use in the course of time enhanced their competence over Tamil. It otherwise leads to the situation of less usage of mother tongue (Kasaba language ). The modern communication network and hegemony of regional language, also minimize the use of mother tongue Kasaba language, in their living environment.

These apart, certain other questions have also been posed to Kasaba tribal people, for them they have expressed their options and those are explained here.

For the question, whether mother culture can survive without mother tongue?, majority of the informants said that the native culture can live only when native language lives. They further said that not only culture but also, their knowledge, wisdom, worldview, observation about society they witness and all other things are stored in their languages. Their language is not just a tool for communication, rather the carrier of their age-old knowledge, which their grandparents generated. So, majority of the Kasaba tribes wish to preserve their native language not only for communication purposes, but also for retaining their knowledge and cultural systems. So, they feel keeping their mother tongue is important and some informants from Kasaba population, are of view that they would take efforts to keep their Kasaba language alive.

For this purpose, some informants have expressed their views that the Kasaba language has to be taught in schools. Moreover, many number of informants have said that though their mother tongue has got a limited number of social domains to be employed and though their mother tongue has no social need in the regional society in which they are living, they feel that their language is superior.

At the same time, many number of Kasaba tribes wish to learn and use Tamil language taking the stance that for practical purposes, leaning and strengthening the competence over Tamil language is important. So that their active participation and interacting with popular and dominant society can be ensured.

Many number of Kasaba tribes wish to offer proper opportunities to their children to learn and retain their mother tongue. Since the educational system at which their children are there, does not promote their mother tongue, but it promotes Tamil language in education domain as the medium of education is Tamil. In school settings, the Kasaba tribal children, by the compulsion of education system, have to learn Tamil suppressing their own mother tongue. Since children have less competence over their mother tongue (because they have less exposure to their mother tongue) with less competence in mother tongue, the children come to school where the communication language is different and automatically the school language will dominate over the previously learnt linguistic system of tribal students.

Because of this situation, the Kasaba tribal parents want their children to have good command over their mother tongue and at the same time they have to learn the regional language. A kind of compromising tendency is found among majority of the Kasaba parents whose children get education through regional language.

For this, they say that their mother tongue is their identity. They therefore want to retain their language as it is their identity.

When a question, how well do you speak your mother tongue? Was asked, the majority of the Kasaba tribal people said they can have conversation in limited situations but they cannot express everything in their mother tongue. Contrary to this, some informants said that they are able to speak in their mother tongue in simple words and simple sentences.

For the question, how often you use your mother tongue, majority of the Kasaba tribal population said that they use their mother tongue “less often”? and when asked how often do you use your mother tongue? The Kasaba tribes expressed the following kinds of expressions.

All the time, all day	12%
Frequently, all day	58%
A few times, every day	16%
A few times, every week	11%
Rarely	3%
	100%

However, no informant said ‘never’ for the above question. It shows a cold fact that all the informants interviewed in one way or other use Kasaba language.

For understanding their mother tongue and other language usage in the home environment of the Kasaba tribal people, questions “who do you speak through mother tongue?” and How often do you speak through them? Were posed and for them, the Kasaba tribal people answered in the following fashions.

Relationship	often	rarely	always
Spouse			(100%)
Children	(80%)		
Grandparent			(100%)
Siblings		(60%)	
Co-workers		(60%)	
Strangers		(40%)	

The above statistics tell that the majority of Kasaba tribal people, always speak Kasaba language while they interact with their spouse and grandparents and majority of them use Kasaba language often with children. But they use their Kasaba language rarely with siblings, co-workers and strangers. It is observed that the Kasaba tribal people in order to ensure the intelligibility, always use Kasaba language in which the spouse and grandparents are convenient and in order to provide learning opportunities to children, the Kasaba tribal people often use Kasaba language with children. In other cases they use Kasaba language just for communicating a message.

It is observed from the description made by the informants who have been interviewed that the following consolidation can be drawn.

Kasaba language is not used as an everyday language in certain social contexts at which Kasaba tribes live currently.

Kasaba language is known to all Kasaba people, but only the older generation has good command over Kasaba language and therefore they are fluent in it whereas the younger generation has less quantum of competence in Kasaba language.

Kasaba language has incorporated many features from Tamil language, because of the language contact situation.

Kasaba language is used mostly by children in limited situations, whereas elderly people use it in all situations.

Besides this, when asked about the linguistic issues the Kasaba tribal people face in using their mother tongue, they said that in public domains such as banking, schooling, hospital, government offices, entertainment hall, newspaper, T.V and mobile phone etc., they have a lot of linguistic hurdles, because of not being able to use their mother tongue in those platforms and poor competence in Tamil language. So there are some communication hurdles they experience in socialization process, especially in mainstream society.

## **Conclusion**

Kasaba tribal people, as they are exposed to regional social settings, and modern communication network, become bilinguals, expect older generation as it confines its socialization process within its society.

The younger generation is more exposed to the regional language and regional culture. Thus, the language of younger generation of Kasaba tribe is prone to have the impact of Tamil language which they have learnt as second language and medium of education. The Kasaba tribal people are well aware that their language does not gain social need, but to compensate they tend to learn and use Tamil so as to perform certain social routines out their settlements. However, they feel that their language is superior in all respects as it is the storehouse of their knowledge and cultural systems.

Majority of the Kasaba people have language loyalty and they are not ready to discard their mother tongue and in fact they are interested to retain by any means. They have a compromising view towards their mother tongue and the regional language Tamil. Although majority of the Kasaba tribes are able to steer Tamil for certain public social activities, they find a number of communication and cultural bottlenecks in Tamil – socialization process in the mainstream society of Tamil Nadu. For this, they take double –stand strategy of



acquiring and using regional language Tamil for practical purpose, not at the cost of sacrificing their own mother tongue.

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