

## Language and Society Assignment – 2

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Language primarily used: Tamil

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1)

Languages have been varying and changing along the centuries. For instance, after the fall of the Roman Empire, Latin evolved via Vulgar Latin into the Romance Languages. The long process of change from Vulgar Latin into the dialects that eventually became the regional dialects in Italy happened over many centuries.

According to Wolfram (2006, p. 333): “If structure is at the heart of language, then variation defines its soul”.

In other words, it means that language is a dynamic system, which is in constant evolution to supply its speakers’ communicative needs. Sociolinguistics, a field concerned with the study of language variation and change, can prove that variability (variation) follows some structural patterns enabling the speakers to understand each other during the communicative interaction.

Hence let us look closer into this by defining our main terms: Social Variable and Linguistic Variable.

### Linguistics Variable:

A linguistic variable is a linguistic item (lexical items such as vocabulary, grammatical, phonological, syntactic, semantic, etc) which has identifiable variants, which are the different forms which can be used in an environment. (M.Fuller)

#### **Eg) Phonological level:** /əʊ/ to /oʊ/

In Great Britain English, the diphthong /əʊ/ starts in the centre of the mouth (such as in GO, NO & SHOW), whereas in American it starts to the back /oʊ/ (such as in GO /goʊ/, NO /noʊ/, SHOW /ʃoʊ/). There is great variance on both sides of the Atlantic for this sound.



#### **Eg) Lexical Level**

Wardhaugh (1986) further argues that the words like ‘singing’ and ‘fishing’ are sometimes pronounced by some speakers as ‘singin’ and ‘fishin’ respectively. The final sound in these words is called the linguistic variable [ŋ] with its two variants as [ŋ] in ‘singing’ and ‘fishing’ and [n] in ‘singin’ and ‘fishin’.

#### **Eg) Morphosyntactic level**

In French, there is the deletion of the negation particle *ne* in the negative structure “*ne* (proclitic) ... *pas* (general marker of negation)”: *Je ne vois pas* ~ *Je Ø vois pas*.

Labov (1972) defines language as an instrument used by the members of a community with the purpose of communicating with one another. It is hence relevant to cite that language comes from a heterogeneous nature, not from a homogenous one. According to him, variation is to be viewed

as an inherent part of the language, which can be observed in the vernacular of everyday life (newspapers, etc). He also states that variation is conceived as two or more ways of saying the same thing. (Labov)

Hence from the above observations, we can finally conclude our definition of a linguistic variable: a term that refers to a specific feature of a language which shows particular variation in a community and which is used as a tag for classifying a speaker's speech.

### **Social Variable:**

Labov's basic assumption was that linguistic variation is socially determined. He further states that speakers are in a double bind: on the one hand they show an identification with their locality through the use of a local variety of language. On the other hand, they also tend to aspire social acceptability and hence in their speech they move towards the standard of their area. (Labov)

One factor which has been prominent in sociolinguistic studies of variation is social class membership. Sociologists use a number of different scales for classifying people when they attempt to place individuals somewhere within a social system. (M.Fuller)

We can define social variable as social factors such as age, gender, ethnicity, or social background which may account for the use of one speech feature rather than another. For instance, Miriam Meyerhoff found that younger people in the Wellington area in New Zealand used more American lexical items than older people in the same community. The social factor here is age. (Wilson)

Social factors can differ from setting to setting. For example, if we approach an educational scale, we may divide into categories such as: graduate or professional education, college or graduation, high school graduation, etc. And if we were to approach an occupational scale, we would categorize into different scales of professionality, skilled, unskilled workers, technicians, etc. We should also remember that these categories would change as time passes on as well.

2) All of the below given Word 1 and Word 2 (and Word 3) in each column, mean and denote the same exact thing. As they are just different ways of saying thing in the same language either used by same people in different scenarios (per requirement of communicative competency) or by different people of the same language from different social classes.

- Set 1

	<b>Word 1</b>	<b>Word 2</b>	<b>Meaning of words</b>
1)	Aathu	Vitu	House
2)	Jalam/Theertham	Thaneer	Water
3)	Patsanam	Palakaram	Snacks
4)	Porela	Poringala	Are you going?

- Set 2

	<b>Word 1</b>	<b>Word 2</b>	<b>Meaning of words</b>
1)	Vinayam	Vivaram	To be aware of everything
2)	Sooru	Sadam	Cooked Rice
3)	Vaiyathinga	Thitathinga	Do not scold

4)	Pozhaika	Pizhaika	For work / To earn
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- Set 3

	Word 1	Word 2	Meaning of words
1)	Kunthu	Ukkar	Sit
2)	Kisidivain	Vetidivain	Slay (killing sense)
3)	Pecharu	Kadipu	Problematic
4)	Pilla	Poi	Lie (opposite of truth)

- Set 4

	Word 1	Word 2	Word 3	Meaning of words
1)	Malatai	Verkadalai	Nilakadalai	Ground nut
2)	Anthanda	Anthakam	-	That side
3)	Yera kattu	Thuki malai vai	-	Keep an object up

#### #Fun Fact:

The word 'Malatai' originated from the word 'Manila Kottai'. 'Manila' denoting the capital of Philippines and 'kottai' denoting the tamil word for 'seed'. The name 'Manilakottai' (meaning Manila nut) for groundnut prevalent in South Arcot district (of Tamil Nadu) probably refers to fact that its from Manila in the Philippines (Sheshadri, 1962). Subba Rao (1909), therefore, states that "it is possible that the groundnut found its way, from the New World to India via the Philippines." (Talawar)

In fact, all the above given word 1s are most commonly used in the South Arcot district of Tamil Nadu. We shall look at it further in the next section.

3) Now, we will look at the different social variables of the given above linguistic variables. We shall go about it set wise according to the bullet points in the previous answer.

The state of Tamil Nadu is the home to various sects of people. The people of this state belong to different social groups. Technically speaking, there is a social stratification or we may call it social heterogeneity in the Tamil Speech community.

- In set 1,

Word 1: Aathu, Jalam/Theertham, Patsanam and Porela are words and phrases used by the Brahmin Tamil-speaking community of Tamil Nadu.

Word 2: Vitu, Thaneer, Palakaram, Poringala are spoken by other non-brahmin castes in Tamil Nadu.

Tamil Brahmins are an ethnoreligious community of Tamil-speaking Hindu Brahmins, predominantly living in Tamil Nadu, though they number significantly in Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, Karnataka, and Sri Lanka.

(McDonough & Johnson, 1997) through their investigation into the basis of the contrast among five liquids in a dialect of Tamil, the Brahmin dialect of Tamil is said to have unusual inventory of five 'distinctive' sounds: plain and retroflex rhotics, and plain and retroflex laterals, and a fifth which has been previously described as rhotic. (McDonough)

Predominantly, Brahmins are viewed as a higher caste in society. Reasons range from professions to early Hindu caste system divisions. Thus, the variable 'caste' divides the speech community into two groups of speakers.

#### **Toy Study:**

Both my parents having grown up in Tamil Nadu had their educations (till college level) complete in Tamil Nadu itself. My dad studied in Tamil medium while my mom, english. But it is to say that a significant amount of conversations in and out of school took place majorly in Tamil due to them having grown up in towns (rather than cities).

While my parents themselves are not brahmins, in school, a number of their close friends were Brahmins. They were either children of the local town priests or other well-educated families (owing to the historical importance of the brahmin caste and them being a 'forward caste', they enjoy high societal importance either through professions or education).

Having grown up with them, both my parents were able to pick up a few distinct terms and words used in the Brahmin community speech. For this study, I had my parents and grandparents recall a few of their conversations and record these words. My parents also contacted their friends who thus confirmed the usage of these terms in their language. It is to note that this speech is more evident in the Tamil spoken in villages and towns than cities where it has diluted a lot more due to many reasons (westernization, gobalization, etc).

On top of this, I also conducted small interviews with the few Tamil speaking students I found on campus.

Their recordings: <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1uaAzN8Lfn-qL1XDwOZjdID4CsMQRux7O?usp=sharing>

Study Analysis: [sheet 1]

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1psoN9mwtP4qtugY6FMm6-t4UdRsxIsEF9ewlXpGKyAk/edit?usp=sharing>

When we see the analysis, we can see how the older generations stick to the distinctions we defined in terms of social class which in this case is Brahmins and Non-Brahmins. When it comes to our generations, the distinctions may not longer apply as much or are used in separate scenarios (say they (brahmins) might use word 1 to converse to converse at home and word 2 outside). This maybe because of globalization, or hanging out with friends from different social classes, or even the banishment of the caste system, no longer associating with terminologies of a particular caste, or more.

- In set 2,  
Word 1: Vinayam, Sooru, Vaiyathinga, Pozhaika are spoken more commonly in small villages.  
Word 2: Vivaram, Sadam, Thitathinga, Pizhaika are spoken in larger towns and cities.

In villages and rural areas, the standard of education (be it tamil or english medium) is unfortunately significantly lesser than that of other urban areas. The type of occupations also largely ranges to different types of farmers.

Every individual of the society doesn't have equal opportunity to get education. Therefore, some are literates and others have grown as illiterates. The highly educated and literate class of the Tamil society usually hails from the urban areas and the rural Tamil speakers have been lag behind in the field of education. The reason for this little percentage of literacy among the rural Tamil speakers is their rural and agricultural background. As they are busy in looking after their agricultural lands and livelihood, they tend to pay little attention to education.

Their speech when compared with others from urban areas, show significant difference and are considered by others to be lowlier of nature. Thus, we can say that **education** is another important social variable on the basis of which the entire speech community has been divided into groups.

### **Toy Study:**

While my parents grew up majorly in towns, my grandparents grew up in villages and then moved to live on in towns. My maternal granddad hails from Thirukkarugavur village, maternal grandmom from Udaiyur village, paternal granddad from Peralaiyur village and paternal grandmom from Kunamanagalam village. All of these villages are in central Tamil Nadu.

While my grandparents did move to towns for further education, their childhood was primarily in these villages. Hence, they heard and grew up around village talk. My maternal granddad after retirement, decided to get a small farm in a nearby village to continue his passion of agriculture.

Every year, visiting the farm is always a main agenda during vacation. The farm employs local farmers, errand boys and other small-time retailers. When interacting with them, the language exhibited by them and us hold substantial differences.

Having observed those variants all through my life when visiting, for this study, we make use of it. It is also observed from poorer migrants in towns who usually hail from villages searching for larger pay. They often tend to work menial jobs due to their lack of education.

The movie 'Muthal Mariyathai', set in a village setting. It is a tale of twists and turns following the inhabitants of the villages, and full of romance and drama.

The movie: <https://g.co/kgs/wzdwn>

Full movie watch link: <https://youtu.be/SkdZ66lXnA0?t=840>

In the above link, if you see the movie from timestamp 14:00 to 16:00 minutes, you will be able to hear all the 4 words we have specified above (under Word 1).

- In set 3,  
Word 1: Kunthu, Kisidivain, Pecharu, Pilla is used in slums of Tamil Nadu  
Word 2: Ukkar, Vetidivain, Kadipu, Poi is used in other places, be it rural or urban

The total slum population of Tamil Nadu in the selected 63 Municipal Towns as per the Census of India 2001 (provisional) is 2,838,366. The largest slum population is found in the Chennai Corporation where 10,79,414 persons are reported as slum dwellers. The Literacy rate for the Slum Population of Tamil Nadu is 71%. Males (77%) have a higher Literacy rate than Females (65%). (Martin J. Bunch)

Out of the major cities with highest population in slums, Chennai ranks fourth after Mumbai, Hyderabad and Kolkata. Rapid urbanization and employment in unorganized sector are the major factor for slum population in Chennai.

Over here the large social variable would be **income**, or rather **poverty** in the case of slums. The variables of caste and religion play equally important role in patterning and growth of slums. Caste is an important factor influencing the socio-economic status of any society. The employment status is a basic indicator of economic soundness of households.

### Toy study

To research more about the different variants present between Tamil speech in slums and other regions, I watched some recommended Tamil films where the main characters either grew up in slums or spoke languages commonly found in slums.

The movies are:

- 1) Kaaka Muttai: <https://g.co/kgs/8ytcBg>
- 2) Apoorva Sagodharargal: <https://g.co/kgs/1rUJVK>

The first movie, being my favourite, follows the journey of two brothers growing up vividly in the slums of Chennai. The movie follows their adventure through life's twists and turns as they try hard to earn money to taste a pizza for the first time after seeing it in a TV commercial. Not only does it provide a great insight into vivid minds of kids, it also provides a great insight into the speech used by children and elders in a slum community.

In a story about class divide, Kaaka Muttai also makes endearing points about community. The one friend that the two kids have outside of their slum is referred to as "Pazharasam" (rice and stew). His real name is never mentioned, and yet they share a delicate bond, tied by their slang names. Even the word 'Kaaka Muttai' means 'crow egg' which is a delicacy enjoyed in the slums when they cannot afford chicken eggs. The 4<sup>th</sup> word 'Pilla' means 'to lie' (opposite of truth) and it is mentioned at time 1:54 in the trailer.

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bm6RCZgptkU>)

The other two movies also depict language used in the slums which form one of the poorest parts of society.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> word 'Pecharu' is used frequently in the movie 'Apoorva Sagodharargal'. It originally derives from the English word 'Badger'. It means irritating or problematic

- In set 4,  
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Word 1: Malatai, Anthanda, Yera kattu is used in the South Arcot district of Tamil Nadu

Word 2: Verkadalai, Antha Pakam, Thuki malai vai is used in other regions of Tamil Nadu

Word 3: Nilakadalai is used in Kanchipuram district

South Arcot District was a district in the Madras Presidency of British India. It covered the area of the present-day districts of Cuddalore, Kallakurichi and Viluppuram in Tamil Nadu.

### Toy Study

The South Arcot district was sub-divided into four sub-divisions:

- Pennathur sub-division: Tindivanam taluk, Tiruvannamalai (partly: pennathur) taluk and Villupuram taluk.
- Tirukkoyilur sub-division: Kallakurichi taluk and Tirukkoyilur taluk.
- Chidambaram sub-division: Chidambaram and Vriddhachalam taluks
- Cuddalore sub-division: Cuddalore taluk.

My mom hails from the town of Chidambaram while my dad from Vriddhachalam, both thus belonging to the district of South Arcot.

I had conducted a small survey among my relatives and friends (all Tamil-speaking) to see what words everyone one choose to use (given in set 4) as I could not find any particular social variant for the linguistic variables yet.

The google form for the study:

<https://forms.gle/8vZVgWX8DqcTFUF16>

The spreadsheets result of the study: see sheet 2

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1psoN9mwtP4qtugY6FMm6-t4UdRxsIsEF9ewlXpGKyAk/edit?usp=sharing>

In the response sheet above, the people from South Arcot have been marked in red color (36.36%) and the rest have been marked in green (chennai → light green (42.42) + rest → dark green (21.21%) = (63.63%)).

\*\* is given above. It is mentioned right below "In set 4,"

	No. of people surveyed from particular region	% of people surveyed from particular region	No. of words used according to above **	% of words used according to above **
South Arcot	12	36.36%	58 / 63	92%
Rest of TN	21	63.63%	12/ 36	55.5%

The results draw a rough line into indicating that words under Word 1 were primarily used by inhabitants of South Arcot regions including towns of Cuddalore, Ariyalur and Mayiladudurai. These words were also the ones commonly used by my family as they also hailed from this region.

While words under Word 2 were used by those living in towns/cities including Chennai, Tiruchirappalli (Trichy) and Thanjavur.

The word under Word 3 is used by speakers in the regions of Kanchipuram.

[Disclaimer: The slight inaccuracies (namely the 55.5%) is mostly due to migration of educated class from towns present in the South Arcot district to urbanized cities such as Chennai, Trichy, etc.]

From the above survey however, it is still impossible to find a social class marking the difference usages of the linguistic terms as we can see that people belonging to the same social class (more or less) use different terms. It thus shows variation through region.

Hence, we can classify this linguistic variable as an indicator. Indicators are those which do not showcase any social import.

The other classification is a marker which are quite noticable and carries evident social information. The first three examples we saw are all linguistic markers as they carry immense variation due to difference in social classes.

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From Saville-Troike's definition, a member of a speech community can be be part of multiple communities. And from Robert Le Page's definition, we can see how an identity of a person whether it be one they identify themselves with or others identify themselves with plays a huge role in their membership into the particular speech community.

The variables we looked at above are caste, education, poverty, and region. When we look at the above communities, we see two speech communities created on the basis of division of caste, two on division of educational level, two on poverty and region. Offcourse, these can range from two to multiple.

So, when we look at communities with these particular variables as the seperating factors, we can label all of them as individual yet perhaps overlapping speech communities which share share at least one linguistic variety. There may also be a gradual shift of some people from one to another on basis of levels of their education, income, migration, etc.

Let us analyse all the communities individually

1. Variable: caste

Yes, in this case the speech communities can be different such as one for Brahmins, Non-Brahmins, etc. There will also be an overall Tamil speech community to which both these groups may belong too. There may also be other speech communities overlapping such as region-based ones, religion based, etc.

2. Variable: education

Yes, in this case speech communities can exist where there are people only educated till school level, junior college level, college level, university, etc. In places where english is considered to be of more prestige than local language, there will also exist different speech communities where one education was done in english medium and the other in local language medium.

3. Variable: income (poverty)

Yes, speech communities will exist where one's salary is significantly lesser or higher as compared to another. This will reflect in their livelihood, housing, education, etc. An example for this can include those living in slums, middle class apartments, higher class condos, etc. The societal interaction circles between all of them run different and may result in variation in language patterns, etc.

4. Variable: region

Yes, even for those speaking the same language, say Tamil in this case, there are still variations across regions in the state, or Sri Lanka, Mauritius, Singapore, etc. In Tamil Nadu itself, there are 6 major dialects available, namely, Centamil, Kongu Tamil, Chennai Tamil, Tirunelveli Tamil, Madurai Tamil, and Kumari Tamil. All of the mentioned also belong to an overall speech community just based on the language of Tamil. Crisscrossing across these regional barriers, we also have speech communities divided by social classes, gender, etc.





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