

Individual Report for Project

Jerrin John Thomas

2019114012

Sociolinguistic Analysis of Social Stratification

Overview

The project involves analysis of stratification in society through a sociolinguistic perspective. The plan of action is to form a hypothesis using thorough analysis of language in advertisements, TV shows, movies and interviews, then try and confirm it through a survey form, which asks for a person's social background, and their relatability to the advertisements.

Work Done

The first task to be done was deciding the sociolinguistic variables which we would be considering. After some discussions, we narrowed it down to 7 features

Then, the datasets for the analysis were required. For that any material, where social stratification was visible, was collected. These included advertisements, movies, tv shows and interviews. These can be used to observe and analyse the targeting towards particular social classes. Also the interactions between people of different and the same social classes could also be seen.

Then comes the observations and analysis. The analysis focussed on the variation in linguistic and non-linguistic features during targeting and interactions. These features could be phonetic or lexical. These in turn would show different phenomena at play like code switching and mixing, diglossia, register and jargon usage, and so on.

For getting a better understanding and for finding a better methodology, some research paper reading was done. The first paper was "The research topic landscape in the literature of social class and inequality". This discussed the research done in social stratification so far. The next one was "Social Class, Social Status and Stratification: Revisiting Familiar Concepts in Sociolinguistics" by Christine Mallinson. It introduced the concepts related to social stratification and reported a case study done in Texana, North Carolina.

The third and the one which was given the most focus was "A Sociolinguistic Investigation of Social Stratification and Linguistic Variation among the Kashmiri Speech

Community” by Nisar Ahmad Koka. It investigates the linguistic variation among the Kashmiri speakers at the level of phonology and lexicon of their language in accordance with certain social variables, that are, religion, education, region/socioeconomic status, age and occupation, and the reasons behind it. It looks into how the social heterogeneity of the Kashmiri speech community is reflected in the linguistic behavior of its speakers, and gives rise to variations in the use of their language at the level of phonology and lexicon. The social factors such as religion, region, education, age, occupation, socioeconomic levels/status etc. are responsible for variation in language and the resultant linguistic items are called linguistic or sociolinguistic variables.

The paper briefly touches upon informal & formal registers, diglossia, social variables and sociolinguistic variables. Then it focuses on the case study on the Kashmiri speech community. The data for the study had been collected by various methods, such as the distribution of the questionnaire, conducting interviews, and the investigator’s direct involvement in some conversations with various members of the speech community. The analysis of variation of the phonological and lexical features due to the difference in religion, education, age and occupation.

Some advertisements in Malayalam were analysed, and the linguistic and non-linguistic features leading to social stratification were identified. Most of the advertisements targeted based on occupation. The features observed were phonetic & lexical features, code switching and mixing, register and jargon usage, accent and setting.

Based on these features, analysis of the manual advertisement collection was done. Out of the 9 advertisement analysed, one particular advertisement was of the Kisan Call Center (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DoRGDqGm-FA>). The setting is that of a farming couple working in a field. The conversation continues and then different farmers on the phone can also be seen. The targeting of the advertisement can be done for the different dimensions:

Language: The advertisement has been dubbed to pure Malayalam. The conversation is in a very casual register. The addressing of the wife by the husband as “dhey ketto” is pretty common among village people. Very simple language understandable by everyone is used.

Occupation: It is targeted towards farmers, as seen from the setting and the topic of conversation.

Wealth: It is targeted towards lower class. This can be seen in the usage of feature phones and traditional attire.

A point to note here is that since they are targeting the lower class farmers throughout the country, the government made the advertisement in one language and dubbed it to the regional languages for reaching them.

Regarding the form for confirming the hypothesis, one form had been made, where the user themselves had to enter the advertisements. But the results were too sparse to generalise. In the second form, participants are shown a curated set of advertisements, to specifically target some social factors. Unfortunately, after sanitisation, that is removing people who filled the Malayalam fields without knowing the language, there were only 12 responses. This was too less for a quantitative analysis as even the people of different categories were not there.

Challenges

The form data had a very sparse distribution. The responses were too less for a proper quantitative analysis. Also, it was noted that people filling forms usually have different perspectives to the different questions. This can lead to variation of responses from what is expected. From the research papers read, the idea of doing a case study was considered, but absence of proper dataset for carrying out was a major challenge, leading to the abandonment of the idea.