

VITALITY OF BADAGA LANGUAGE

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In linguistics, the stress is on the spoken form of language. The written form is considered the natural progression to it and seen as a record of the spoken version.

In mother tongue learning situation, children are given time to learn the mother tongue at their own pace. Due to this they are likely to start loving it.

There are many tribal languages in India. In Nilgiri district of Tamil Nadu alone more than ten tribal languages are spoken and one among them is Badaga. Badagas have separate villages of their own. The Badagas who are living outside identify these villages as their natives. There are over three hundred and fifty Badaga villages. It is to be noted here almost all the Badaga village names are Badaga origin. In the same way exclusively Badagas are living in these villages.

All the villages of Badaga community have a primary school (1-5) or a middle school (6-8). High schools and higher secondary schools are found in the circle headquarters. Most of these schools are government Tamil medium schools. In the present scenario most of the children of young age go to school. Since there is a primary school in every village almost everyone attends up to 5th standard. These primary schools often had teachers from their own village or nearby villages. These teachers too sometime communicate with students in mother tongue, Badaga. In primary school the students are mostly from the same village. However mostly they communicate with fellow students in mother tongue, Badaga. Therefore, a student who has been only to a primary school (1-5) has very less or short possibility of being exposed to Tamil language.

Of late many students are attending English medium schools. Even though these students are taught English at school they communicate with fellow students either in Tamil or in their mother tongue, Badaga.

Almost all are using their mother tongue at home with parents, children and siblings. Most of the people use their mother tongue at their villages.

Almost all people use Tamil with outsiders. It is important to mention here that the Badaga community has to use mother tongue, Badaga instead of Tamil to communicate with the people of Nilgiri origin such as Todas, Kotas, Kurumas, Kasabas, and Irulas. This is due to the sequel of Badaga language's lingua franca status of this district.

While speaking to neighbours and village-head all prefer mother tongue. Who did not have any schooling prefer to use mother tongue in almost all the situations with the tribes of the same community. Among uneducated people, especially uneducated women use of mother tongue is so strong. Majority of the people use their own mother tongue with the people from their own tribe in the market. With those from other tribes of the Nilgiri they use Badaga and with others Tamil. The market domain necessitated the use of Tamil.

Non-Badaga teachers of local schools use Tamil with their students. In the same way students use Tamil either their non-Badaga teachers. Some local teachers, especially of high school and higher secondary school teachers prefer Tamil with the students of Badaga community. It is evident that the Tamil medium of education had contributed in promoting Tamil bilingualism among the youngsters. However the Badagas are bilinguals and most of them are capable of using Tamil.

Majority of the Badagas use their own mother tongue for personal prayer. The temple priests too use mother tongue while doing poojas. Badagas sing Tamil and other language devotional songs in addition to Badaga songs during weekly poojas and festival occasions. Any how the prayer and priests blessing words are always in Badaga. In festival occasions and common gatherings mother tongue domination is there.

With fellow workers of the same tribe, all of them use the mother tongue. However in communication with fellow workers of other, majority of them use Tamil. In government offices there is a slightly increased use of Tamil because there are government officials who are Tamil speakers. Where there are government officials of Badaga speakers the use of Badaga language with fellow Badaga is there.

In relation to business like marketing, majority of the Badagas feel that the Tamil is more useful. Youngsters feel the need to come up to the level of the mainstream society in education and employment and in that respect they feel the need to be fluent in using Tamil and English. The students who studied Tamil medium schools say that English was harsh and comment so because English was difficult for them to learn.

Most of them watch T.V programme of Tamil. In the same way they prefer to have books in Tamil. Some prefer English books. This is due to, there is no books available in Badaga language and next is, due to the fact that they were educated in Tamil/ English medium.

The present day medium of education and influence of the modern media had substantially contributed for the increase of Tamil bilinguals, among the youngsters.

The Badaga community has a positive attitude towards their mother tongue and use it in their home and village domains and in other social contexts with people belonging to their own tribe. And also people of this community use their mother tongue with the tribes of the Nilgiri district. Tamil is used in most of the social contexts with those who are from outsiders to Nilgiri district.

This assessment shows that Badaga language has the vitality to continue to be spoken by succeeding generations. Even though their language use is broader and their attitude towards their mother tongue is so strong, the importance of the mother tongue is little known to them. Hence need of the hour is to make them understand the importance of the mother tongue. In that way, it is important to make them understand the heritage of their language and culture.