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## KODAVA SPEECH COMMUNITY: AN ETHNOLINGUISTIC STUDY

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

This paper presents a global ethnolinguistic view of the Kodavas, a minority community in south India. It deals with the ethnolinguistic aspects of the language spoken by this community from the point of view of communication, identity, and social reality. The paper presents certain problems that the language and the linguistic community face, and the future prospects for the development of the language.

The Kodavas or Coorgis are a minority community with a population of 97,011 persons according to the 1991 census. (There were 79,172 persons who claimed Kodava to be their mother tongue in the 1961 census.) The majority of the Kodavas live in the Kodagu (Coorg) district situated on the Western Ghats in Karnataka, India. The Kodavas have maintained a distinct identity in terms of customs, rituals, dress, food, and language from the neighbouring peoples for a very long time.

### 2. HISTORICAL AFFINITY

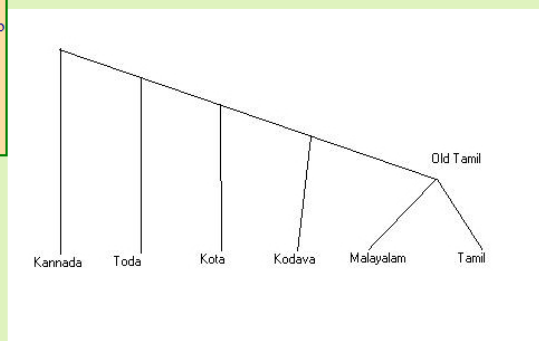
Some historians suggest that the Kodavas might have migrated into their present area in the Coorg district around the 3rd century A.D. The Yeravas, Kurubas, Male-Kudiyas and Holayas also are found in this area (Richter, 1987).

There are different theories about the origin of Kodavas. One view is that the Kodava culture resembles the culture of the ancient trading stock of Araba (Moeling 1855). Another view is that the Kodavas are descendants of Scythians (Connor 1870, Rice 1878). According to yet another view, the Kodavas belong to the Indo-Scythian race. Kodavas have no resemblance to any other people group of South India since their average cephalic index is 80.6 and the nasal index is 65.2. This may prove that the Kodavas are the descendants of the Brachycephalic stock who entered into the Indus Valley during the Mohenjodaro period and migrated to the Coorg region (Hutton, as quoted in Balakrishnan 1976). These are all theories, and we do not have any definite clue or evidence to prefer one theory over another.

### 3. KODAVA LANGUAGE

The origin or the root of the Kodava language, however, is easily traceable. Comparative Dravidian studies have shown that Kodava belongs to the South Dravidian Language group. The following figure shows the family tree:

Pre-South Dravidian group



(Krishnamurti 1969).

Though Kodava language belongs to the Dravidian family, some have claimed that the Kodava people themselves may not be of Dravidian origin. If this theory or belief is accepted, then we need to explain how the Kodava people group has a language that clearly belongs to the Dravidian family of languages. We do notice that people groups could give up their language over a period of time and adopt another language as their own. Kodavas might have given up their language and shifted to a new language. Such a language shift is a common phenomenon throughout the world. In India, Khasis belong to the Mongoloid group physically, but their language belongs to the Austro-Asiatic group. The Gonds are a Dravidian tribe, but a section among them has shifted to the Indo-Aryan language, Chhatti-gadhi. While the Bhils have been considered sometimes as belonging to the Dravidian family and sometimes belonging to the Munda stock, they speak an Indo-Aryan language called Bhili. These cases of the entire ethnic group switching to another language show that there is no inherent or necessary link between the language group and its ethnicity. It also clearly shows that no group can ever claim to be belonging to a pure race. In a sense, the entire Indian demography is one of racial admixture. It is only the language that may be used to distinguish one group from another.

Linguistically, Kodava shows some deviations from the rest of the Dravidian languages. To cite one example, Dravidian languages have 5 short and 5 long vowels. In addition to these vowels, Kodava has two more vowels, namely, /i/ high central unrounded vowel and /e/ mid central unrounded vowel which are also distinguished as short and long. (Balakrishnan, 1976).

These peculiarities and distinctness of Kodava had attracted the attention of the scholars even in the sixteenth century. However, they did not consider Kodava as an independent language. It was always considered as a dialect of Kannada, closer to Tulu (Ellis 1816), or closely related to Malayalam and Tamil (Moegling 1855). It was in early 20th century that the philologists and linguists recognized Kodava as an independent language.

Kodava/Coorgi is also the mother tongue of some other communities such as Airi, Male-Kudiyas, Meda, Kembatti, Kapal, Maringi, Heggade, Kavadi, Kolla, Thatta, Koleya, Koyava, Banna, Golla, Kanya, Ganiga, and Malaya, living mainly in the Coorg region. Many of these communities have migrated into Coorg from Malabar during the period of Haleri Dynasty. There is no research done so far to find out the variation in Kodava language in terms of these communities.

### 4. NO MARKED VARIATION AT THE SOCIAL LEVEL

An important aspect of Kodava language behavior is the role played by the speech variety used by the speakers in conveying information about the background of the speaker. People from different social and geographic backgrounds use different varieties of the Kodava language. These varieties could be regional variations, namely, Mendale takka (North Coorg Variety), and Kiggaati takka (south Coorg variety) (Rajyashree 1972).

Kodava does not show a marked variation at the social level. However, the social differences can be observed through code-mixing and code-switching. Code-mixing is observed while speaking/writing one code or language, mixing vocabulary of another code/language. Code-switching is resorted to by the speakers when they switch to another code or language, while speaking/writing one code. In the case of Kodava population, the code mixed or switched is often English, though the use of Kannada, Hindi or Malayalam is also seen rarely. The Kodavas residing outside Coorg show more code-mixing and code-switching than those who live in Coorg. The Kodavas from the higher middle class, and those who are highly educated show more mixing of English or code-switching to English, while those belonging to the lower middle class show more mixing of other languages. However, there are no marked social variations in Kodava.

## 5. SIGNS OF STANDARDIZATION

Kodava also shows the phenomenon of standardization. The speakers of Kodava from the South Coorg area switch over to the north Coorg variety for inter-group communication. The socio-cultural reason behind it may be that the administrative center of Coorg, Mercara (Madikeri) is situated in north Coorg. Apart from being the Center or seat of the district administration, Mercara has been the capital of Haleri Kings (17th century) and has been the center of education in the Coorg district since the British period. The emergence and acceptance of a standard variety of Kodava has been stabilized by the use of that variety in the Kodava literature.

Even today, after having considerable written literature and two newspapers published in Kodava, the issue of a suitable script for the Kodava language is still being debated. At present the Kannada script is used to write Kodava.

## 6. KODAVA LANGUAGE - A SYMBOL OF IDENTITY

The Kodava people have a very strong affinity with their language 'Kodava'. Wherever they happen to meet in the world, they speak in their mother tongue only among themselves. They resent if a Kodava speaks to another Kodava in a language other than Kodava. Kodava has the status of a written minority language, but its use is restricted to the domain of home and for informal and formal community gatherings. It is generally recognized that their language function as a symbol, a rallying point for the community, and that it continues to be used for the special functions and in specific domains.

Indeed, the loyalty a people group feels and exhibits toward their language that is spoken only in the restricted domain of home makes that language an integral part of its ethnicity. Such a language becomes more resistant to change, since its restricted use makes it the least visible entity in the mainstream society. Moreover, the restricted home use of this language does not hinder the participation of its users in the mainstream society. Although this language has lost its function in a wider communicative context in the mainstream society, sentimental attachment to that language may survive for a long time and this sentimental attachment will ensure the continuity of that language. Kodava is a fine example of this situation. If a language can survive in this fashion, it can also be resuscitated to its original instrumental communicative function in their society when appropriate socio-political and economic conditions arise.

The restricted use of Kodava language for intra-group communication under the conditions of contact and acculturation for many generations indicates that the community has strong commitment to maintain its language. The strength of this commitment should be seen in the fact that the Kodava language is so much associated with tradition, community life, rituals, and religion that it has come to be perceived as an essential determinant of group solidarity and group identity. It is the carrier of a cultural heritage and a religious tradition.

## 7. COMMUNICATION AND CONTACT WITH OTHER LINGUISTIC COMMUNITIES

In domains other than home and community gatherings, Kodavas use other languages. Like most minorities, Kodavas show a high percentage of bilingualism. All along history, Kodavas have been in constant contact with Malayalam and Kannada. Kodavas had trading contacts with the Malayalam speakers for a very long time. Coorg has a common boundary with Kerala in the southwest and even today majority of the plantation labourers, artisans like carpenters and masons, and Mapilla cloth traders come to Coorg from Kerala.

The contact of Kodava language with Kannada is also of equally long duration. Kannada became the court language of Coorg with the ascendancy of the Haleri Dynasty from the beginning of 17th Century to 1834. In 1834, after the establishment of the British rule, schools were established in Coorg with Kannada as a medium of instruction (Mysore State Gazetteer 1965 pp. 403).

In 1955, the States Reorganization Commission in its recommendation for the merger of Coorg with Karnataka stated that, "Kannada-speaking people form the largest linguistic group in the Coorg, accounting for 35 per cent of its population; Coorgi or Kodagu, which is spoken by about 29 per cent of its people is akin to Kannada and is regarded by some authorities as a dialect of Kannada" (Mysore state Gazetteer 1965:82).

Apart from these facts, Census also shows that Kannada speaking population has been numerically dominant in Coorg.

Distribution of various mother tongue speakers in Kodagu 1971-1991

Language	Census 1951	Census 1971	Census 1981	Census 1991
Kannada	80,410	1,55,838	1,65,345	1,70,000
Kodava	66,642	64,461	81,564	97,011

Muslim cloth merchants from Bhatkal and Honnavar and other tradesmen from Mangalore speaking Konkani/Tulu have also settled in Coorg. For all of them Kannada is a link language. However, most of them speak Kodava also for communication across the communities.

The contact with Kannada is qualitatively different from the contact with Malayalam. Malayalam is mostly the language of the plantation labour and of trade. Kannada, on the other hand, is not only a language used for trade, apart from being the language of the numerically dominant people, it is also the language of education and administration.

## 8. LINGUISTIC ACCULTURATION

The contact of Kodava with Kannada and Malayalam speaking communities has led to acculturation. Religious domain is a case in point. Kodavas do not owe allegiance to any religious head. Their language of religion is Kodava and the family/community members perform all the rituals. However, having come under the Lingayat regime, some of the Saivite practices are absorbed by the Kodava people. Along with the temples of local deities like Aiyappa, Povvadi and Kallamma, every village has temples for Mahadeva or Bhagavati. The interesting thing is that the temples of local deities do not have Kannadiga priests, while the sorcerers who perform black magic are invariably Malayalam speakers. Thus, in the religious domain Kodava shows acculturation. The distribution of the languages according to the rituals performed and the deities worshipped makes it clear that the Kodavas are conscious of what constitute the native elements in their culture and what constitute the outside traits. They have absorbed the outside traits and elements into a co-existing system which is essentially separate and distinct from the native system. The same phenomenon is found in the linguistic acculturation process. In the core vocabulary of Kodava culture there is no influence of outside language.

Another language that has some contact with the Kodava language is Hindi or Hindustani. Most of the Kodavas prefer jobs in the defence establishments and almost one person from each Kodava home gets a job in the military. Hindi or Hindustani is the language of non-formal gatherings in the Indian defence establishments. Kodavas acquire it as part of their careers and socialization in the armed forces. Apart from this, Hindi is taught in the schools and also in Military education, which has led to elite bilingualism in Hindi.

Another language, which is learnt by the Kodavas, is English. English is acquired through schooling. Thus Kodavas show a high degree of bilingualism of both types, bilingualism through socialization and bilingualism through schooling or elite bilingualism. English is an example of total elite bilingualism; Kannada and Hindi are acquired partly through schooling and partly through socialization and Malayalam exclusively through socialization. The mode of acquiring languages seems to have reflected in the attitudes of the Kodavas towards these languages, and the use of these languages. Kodavas attach prestige to the use of English and have positive attitude towards the acquisition of English. Code mixing and code switching are observed more in English. Kannada has considerable positive value but comes only second on the scale for choice of learning. It is viewed more as a functional choice as Coorg is a part of Karnataka state with Kannada as the state official language. The acquisition of Malayalam has no prestige. No Kodava would like to adopt Malayalam as a language of education or would like to learn it formally or would use it in formal conversations. It is always considered a language of the labourers since the Kodavas often learn it from them and use it exclusively with them. Thus the attitudes of Kodavas towards English, the state language- Kannada, and Malayalam show the general trend of the minority language speakers in India towards other Indian languages.

After examining the language use and attitudes among the Kodavas, two aspects, namely, language as the means of communication and language as a symbol of identity, are seen most clearly. Language defined from the point of view of the ethnicity experience is much more than 'a means of communication'. The third aspect of language is equally important, i.e. 'language as a reflection of society'.

## 9. KODAVA LANGUAGE AND SOCIETY

Language and society have an interesting relation. Both reflect each other. Society gets reflected in its language in many ways. Firstly, there are many examples of the physical environment of a society being reflected in its language, normally in the structure of its lexicon - the way in which the distinctions are made by means of single words. For example, whereas English has only one word for snow, the Eskimos have several. The reasons are obvious. The Eskimo people have to be able to distinguish efficiently between different types of snow. Kodavas live in thick forests where varieties of snakes are found. Most Indian languages distinguish snakes by two or three names, but the Kodavas distinguish at least twenty different varieties of snakes, such as *bale muriya*, *kati murki*, *kere pambu*, *volle kidiyi*, *billandi murki*, *pilli pambu*, *pave pambu*, etc.

Secondly, the social environment can also be reflected in the language and can often have an effect on the structure of the lexicon. For example, a society's kinship system is generally reflected in its kinship vocabulary and this is one reason why anthropologists tend to be interested in this particular aspect of language. For example, in Kodava language *mava* could be father-in-law, mother's brother or father's sister's husband; *mayi* could be mother-in-law, father's sister or mother's brother's wife; and *bava* could be husband's elder brother, wife's elder brother, sister's husband, father's sister's son or mother's brother's son. These kinship terms throw light on the marriage system of the community. Kodavas

show a slight variation from the other Dravidian communities. In Kodava, cross-cousin marriage is possible, but uncle-niece marriage is not possible.

Thirdly, in addition to the environment and social structure, the values of a society can also have an effect on its language. The most interesting way in which it happens is through the phenomenon known as taboo. Taboo is associated with things that are not said and, in particular, with words and expressions that are not used. In practice, of course this simply means that there are inhibitions about the normal use of the items of this kind - if they were not used at all they could hardly remain in the language. Generally, the type of word that is tabooed in a particular language will be a good reflection of at least a part of the system of values and beliefs of the society in question. For example, expressing sorrow for a killed animal is a taboo in Kodava culture. It being a martial community and hunting being one of the most respected activity of the community, killing an animal is considered a bravery, an act to be rewarded. Because of these values, expressing any feeling for the killed animal is considered to be a bad omen.

## 10. LEXICON AND CULTURE

Apart from taboo words, total absence of certain words from the lexicon of a language shows that the practices meant by these words are not culturally important in the particular community. For example, there are no words for dowry and prostitution in the Kodava language. In the folk songs and folk tales of Kodavas these words are not found. The report in the gazetteer (Graeter 1870) supports this point. It says, "among the Kodava, there is neither dowry nor bride-price. However, the bridegroom presents the bride a small bag containing silver or gold coins according to his wish and capacity before he takes her to his house." (Mysore State Gazetteer 1965, pp.111). It further says, "Social evils like prostitution are not in evidence in Coorg. There has not been any community of prostitutes in Coorg at anytime. As the general level of culture and education among women of Coorg was higher than that in the neighbouring districts and as the people were economically well off, women knew their rights and were treated well in the family" (ibid pp. 120).

To understand some particular words and phrases, the knowledge of the culture of a society is necessary. For example, to understand the word *mangala* in Kodava, one has to be well versed with the norms, values, customs and traditions of Kodava culture. There are ten types of "mangala" - auspicious occasions - in the Kodava community. These mangalas can be categorized in five major groups.

1. First category: when "mangala" is used in the regular sense of "conjugal relationship," which is called *kami mangala*. Another mangala which comes under this category is *ku:davali mangala* or widow marriage.
2. Second category: when *mangala* ceremony takes place to reward a person or in the sense of felicitation. For example, *Nari mangala* "tiger marriage." A marriage ceremony is performed for a tiger killer, may it be a man or a woman. Another mangala under this category is *payta:ndki alapi mangala* which is performed to honor a woman who gives birth to ten children.
3. Third category: when *mangala* is celebration. *Kodi mangala* is celebrated when a child is born after long longing, or *kemikutti mangala* is the ear-boring ceremony of a male child.
4. Fourth category: This *mangala* is a ritual to ward off the evil. *Bale mangala* is performed after the consecutive death of wives, when the widower is married to a plantain tree before he marries again.
5. Fifth category: This *mangala* is performed for the sanction of rights - either of inheritance, legitimacy or changing the family. These mangalas are called *parije*. For example, *Okka parije* is conducted when the only heir of the family is a woman. According to this marriage, the man ceases to be a member of his natal family and becomes a member of his wife's family and their children become the members of the mother's natal family. Another marriage in this category is *makka parije*. By this marriage, the husband does not become a member of the wife's family as in *Okka parije* but their children have rights of inheritance only in their mother's family. The third marriage in this category is *kutta parije*, which is performed when an unmarried girl becomes pregnant and her partner refuses to marry her. In such cases, the marriage of the girl is performed and the child can take the mother's family name, and the rights of inheritance. This shows that to understand a word *mangala* one has to understand the whole gamut of values and norms of Kodava society.

## 11. TRANSMISSION OF HERITAGE

It is clear from the above discussion that, apart from being a strong token of identity, the Kodava language is a valuable means for transmitting cultural heritage to successive generations. In the last decade with a strong wave of resurgence of culture, the Kodavas felt a strong need to unite and preserve their identity. Such a need for the resurgence of culture is seen throughout the country. For example, after the linguistic reorganization of states and the declaration of a state language as the language of administration, etc., the minorities in almost every state have started to revive their culture and linguistic identities. After the declaration of Assamese as the state language of administration, etc., the Bodo movement gained momentum. Even Mizoram was formed as a separate state, which formerly was a part of Assam state. Arunachal Pradesh and Meghalaya were formed, when the identity of minorities was perceived to be threatened by the dominant state language speakers. Konkani speakers felt a need to preserve their identity with the fear of the imposition of Marathi.

Among the Kodavas, this movement did not focus on achieving a separate political identity because it is a very small community. It did give a strong direction towards preserving the community's separate cultural identity. But a political struggle by a few groups to achieve a distinct political identity for the community through the restoration of the autonomy they enjoyed before the linguistic re-organization of the states continues even today. As a result, 'Kodava takka parishad' - Kodava Language Committee was established in 1978. Two Kodava weeklies *Jamma nangada* and *Brahmagiri* were launched. This Parishad conducts elocution and written competitions in Kodava and distributes awards. This patronage has motivated Kodavas to a great extent and a lot of creative writing is published. Last decade has seen accelerated pace of development of Kodava language. Now, there are two weeklies in Kodava, many amateur groups perform Kodava plays, a movie was made in Kodava, and many audio cassettes are brought out on Kodava folk songs and folk tales. The Kodavas are enthusiastic about the development of Kodava. What is needed is a proper understanding of the language planning processes.

## 12. FUTURE PROSPECTS

There are two major issues in the development of any minority language, namely, the selection of a standard variety, and the selection of a script. I have dealt with these two issues already. The third issue concerns the vocabulary expansion and the development of suitable forms of discourse. There has to be extreme caution while undertaking this task. There has to be a balance between borrowed vocabulary, coinage, and preservation of native items. There is likely to be an influx of borrowings in Kodava, from Kannada, Hindi and English. If Kodava heavily relies on borrowing in the expansion of the lexical stock, it may create a feeling of inferiority and inadequacy among the speakers. This may also hasten the process called "alloglottisation" which involves the influx of vocabulary from the dominant language (Dua 1985). On the other hand, if Kodava places too much emphasis on the native resources for lexical expansion, it may widen the gap between Kodava and the majority languages. Taking all these factors into account, preparation of a dictionary of Kodava language needs to be undertaken.

Another important aspect of language development is the expansion of its domains of use. The use of minority languages in education, mass communication and administration poses serious ideological and practical problems.

One of the major problems of use of Kodava in education is the attitude of Kodavas. Majority of Kodavas consider Kodava as a language of culture rather than education. They feel that Kodava is not adequate enough to be a medium of education even at the primary level. Majority of Kodavas prefer English as the medium of education, and those who can afford it, send their children to English medium schools.

People with a positive attitude towards Kodava language, also do not advocate for Kodava medium as they feel that it will not be feasible economically. Financial resources, textbooks, availability of the teachers, etc., are the major problems according to them.

It should be made clear first that learning through a language other than the mother tongue creates interpretative thinking while the education through the mothertongue develops creative thinking (Shrivastava et al 1984). It also helps the preservation of minority language and culture, which adds its colour to the linguistic and cultural mosaic of India and ensures economic and political viability of the nation by the democratic participation of every community, irrespective of their numerical strength and status. Therefore, education through the Kodava medium at least for pre-primary education and with a bilingual transfer model is the best alternative.

However, the years of education through the mothertongue, textbook preparation, etc., are technical problems, and research in these areas suggests that the Bilingual transfer model, which is based on the sound educational principle of knowing the unknown through known is best suited for the minorities (Annamalai 1973).

We should make the selection of topics, values, and norms with great care when we wish to prepare materials in the minority language in order to use it as the medium of instruction. It is essential for the minority communities to strike a suitable balance between the selection and transmission of the contents of the two cultures when conflicting demands are made on it (Dua 1985).

For the use of Kodava in mass media, already launching two weeklies in it has made a beginning. Feature films in Kodava are produced. Kodava is one of the languages in which broadcasting takes place from the All India Radio Mercara and Mysore stations, and some programmes in Kodava are telecast through the television. It is likely, that the programmes in minority languages may be overshadowed by the quality and range of the programmes broadcast or telecast in the majority languages (Dua 1985). However, if planned with care, these media could be used more effectively in promoting the use and development of Kodava, in transmitting the knowledge and values of the Kodava culture, in strengthening the cultural identity and literary creativeness, and in developing political awareness and group solidarity.

One of the most significant contributions of the Government of Karnataka in this context is the establishment of Kodava Akademi to help the development of Kodava language, People and culture.

A scientific sociolinguistic survey and an ethnolinguistic survey of the Kodava speech community or communities will help us in the preparation of dictionaries, textbooks, and other materials to be used in education and mass communication.

Thus, in order to further strengthen its identity and make a contribution to the multilingual, multicultural, and multiethnic fabric of the country, a careful planning for developing

the complementary roles of both Kodava and majority languages in various domains is necessary. Also given the right conditions and commitment on the part of Kodavas, they would be able to meet their aspirations for the development of Kodava language and the preservation of Kodava culture.

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