

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Changing Status of English: A Sociolinguistic Study of Dakshina Kannada

The study has demonstrated that the people of the district of Dakshina Kannada in Karnataka are a prosperous, well-educated, multilingual community. More than half the total numbers of informants have claimed that they know four languages including English and Kannada besides their community based languages like Konkani, Tulu, Byari and other languages. Each of these languages has more or less definitely assigned roles and domains of use. With the increased importance assigned to travel and tourism in the district, and a plethora of educational, especially at higher level, many people have shown a keen interest in the use of English in their day to day interaction.

Data have shown that English is used largely in formal situations and in the written mode. English has also been reported to be used for good reading and information and entertainment material. It has also been seen that in certain situations English is the only choice nearly everyone has. Some of those situations are, for example, listening to sports commentaries and sending mails. The popularity of English in these situations can also be due to the lack of an appropriate register in any of the other languages available to the informants or at least the lack of popularity of these registers in these languages. English is also used by a large number of informants in situations where they can use another language. Some situations of this kind are communicating with friends from other states, linguistic backgrounds, speaking at social gatherings or making official enquiries in the public domain. It has been shown that this can be due to the community's attitude to English. A large number of informants think that English is the only language they would like their children to learn in school. The community thinks that English is extremely important for getting good jobs, good education and wider communication. In spite of the love and preoccupations with state of one's mother tongue's dwindling usage, persons with reasonably higher social standing find the need to emphasize the compulsion for learning English in order to promote global competencies.

Interestingly, many insights on the effect of multilingualism and mono-lingualism on communities have been traced during the study. The data given about Dakshina Kannada show that multilingualism is not a hindrance to the economic prosperity of the community, nor does it follow that languages that have no script and are considered 'primitive' or 'tribal' are in fact really so and are likely to die out in the face of competition from other languages that are considered highly developed. There is a strong move to assert the value of regional languages like Konkani, Tulu and Pidgin languages like Byari language with establishment of Academies for each of their promotion in terms of literary productions and use in schools and institutions of higher learning. Similarly it also emerges from the data that a multilingual situation is not necessarily a situation of tension or clash among languages. It has been seen that all the languages have definite roles assigned to them and they are used within their given roles and nowhere else. The community here is really multilingual: nobody seems to know less than two languages and no one wants to live with only one. Yet they are all very clear about the roles and cultural values of all these languages. In gist, the utility and commercial value in terms of employability and day to day communication in English has been significantly demonstrated in the interactions with a wide variety of informants in the urban areas.