



Think India (Quarterly Journal)

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Venue- Seminar Hall, **School of Humanities and Social Sciences**, Jain
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Revival of the Endangered Tulu Language and Script: Strategies and Approaches

Prasanna Udipikar,
Associate Professor,
VVN Degree College,
Vanivilas Road, VV Puram,
Bangalore -560 004.
prasannaudipikar@gmail.com
Cell No.: 9449800783

Abstract

The danger of language degeneration is a gnawing threat for the cultural heritage that any language brings along with it. Hence efforts are being made towards revitalization in order to revive the exuberance of the language. Tulu is a Dravidian language spoken in Dakshina Kannada, Udupi and Kasargod districts of Karnataka. According to UNESCO's categorization of the endangered languages, Tulu language of Tulunad falls in the first category called "Vulnerable". This is due to the external influences domineering the Tulu language. If an awakening among the indigenous speakers of Tulu language to save the language does not take place at this stage, then the language reaches the second stage which is categorized by UNESCO as "Endangerment". The external influences such as colonization, globalization, modernization, migration of natives, superiority of English language and advancement of technology are some of the external forces overriding the development of Tulu language. Hence efforts are being made towards revitalization of Tulu language by the indigenous speakers of Tulunad. This paper makes an attempt to provide a birds' eye view of the history of endangered Tulu language and tries to encompass the revitalization measures adopted by the linguists, the government policies and the interested natives who have realized that the revival of the rich culture of Tulu language can be done only through the revival of the indigenous language.

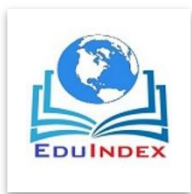
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Key words: Colonization, Dravidian language, endangerment, globalization, migration, revitalization, tulu script.

Language is not just a medium of communication but also a tool which carries the cultural history of any indigenous language. This significant role of the language calls for arduous efforts to gear up the activities towards revitalization and preservation of endangered indigenous languages. One such language which is categorized as endangered and which commands revitalizing strategies and processes is TULU language.

Tulu is a language of Tulunad, spoken by the natives of Dakshina Kannada, Udupi and Kasargod districts. The people who speak Tulu language are called ‘Tuluver’. Tulu language is a proto-Dravidian (original) language found in southern part of India. Tulu script is original to Thigalaya script which is one of the earliest original scripts like Persian and Latin. When Brahmi script prevailed in North India, Tigalari script prevailed in South India. Though the other Dravidian languages saw their zenith, Tulu language has hit nadir.

According to the UNESCO categorization of endangered languages, first stage is Vulnerable or potential endangerment. This is when the language due to external influence gradually starts losing its identity. When at this stage an awakening of the danger does not take place among the indigenous speakers, the language reaches the second stage which is categorized as “Endangerment”. This is the stage where the language is further crushed by the external influences. The indigenous speakers do not pass on the language to their children. Gradually the language loses its mobility and is confined to only few users of the language. When there are no learners left to learn the language or their mother tongue then the language attains death. When the language fails to be passed on to the next generation it becomes extinct. The fourth stage is “Moribund” and the fifth stage is extinct.

Tulu language is in the first stage of UNESCO Categorization of language vitality. It is considered to be an endangered language. The reasons for this are :

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- a) Tulu script (2000 years old) was mainly used to write religious and literary works in Sanskrit. Even today it is the official language of “Ashta Mattah” of Lord Krishna Temple founded by Madhavacharya. Tulu script was thought and learnt in Gurukulas where only Brahmins studied. Thus the use of the script was restricted to religious activities. Hence the written literature of Tulu is not as large as the literature of other literary Dravidian languages. The oldest literary work is the translation of Sanskrit ‘Mahabharato’ by the poet Arunabja (1657AD). The other literary works are: Devi Mahatmayam (1200AD), Sri Bhagavato (1676AD) by Vishnu Tunga. Today Tulu literature is written using Kannada script.
- b) Another notable reason for non-development of Tulu language is that it never had royal patronage. Alupa dynasty had the longest lineage in Tulunad but it patronized Kannada and not Tulu. The great king of Vijayanagara was Tuluva, yet he patronized Telugu language and not Tulu.
- c) Apparently, the quality of migration is very commonly found among Tulu speakers which is also one of the reasons for the degeneration of Tulu language. A popular saying in Tulu language is “Oorudu nanji aanda, paardh badukodu” (If it is tough at home; run away and survive).
- d) The other reasons are the impact of globalization, modernization, advancement in technology with English as the medium are overriding the development of the indigenous language. The influence of English language and the regional Kannada language is more on Tulu language. The children in schools are not encouraged to speak native language. The parents encourage their children to talk in English or any other popular language of the region. Due to this practice of indigenous language speakers, the second generation Tulu speakers are disappearing.
- In the light of these developments, many linguists and speakers and lovers of Tulu language have embarked on various steps to revive and revitalize Tulu language. Tulu Sahitya Academy and Indian Tulu Sahitya Academy are set up by the government.

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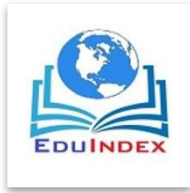
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Teaching Tulu scripts for children in some of the selected schools has begun. Tulu Text books with Kannada script is introduced by Tulu Sahitya Academy, Mangalore. Tulu dictionary is being developed. Tulu dramas and cinemas are attracting the audiences. Tulu International Sammelanas, Tulu Parbas (Tulu festivals) are organized locally as well as globally to unite the migrants through their indigenous language. Yakshagana – a Tulunad folk art is promoted in various places through their performances. A department for “Tulu Studies, Translation and Research” is established Dravidian University, Kuppam in Andhra Pradesh. First Tulu dictionary was brought by German Missionaries Revs. Kammer and Manner in the year 1886 which consisted 3000 words. The Govinda Pai Research Centre at MGM College, Udupi is working on Tulu lexicon project, study on various Tulu dialects, collection of folk literature paardanas (folk lore), etc. In 2011, Mangalore University has begun to offer Certificate Courses, Diploma Courses, PG Diploma Courses in Tulu language both in regular and correspondence modes. Documenting Tulu words using text, sound and video clips is also being done. More Tulu programmes are in vogue for revitalizing Tulu language.

More thrust to be given on introducing Tulu as medium of language of the technology. Tulu language should also be provided as an option along with the other choice based third language in schools and colleges. Teacher training should be conducted for the teachers to teach Tulu language for the children. Regional language Compulsory Certificate Course should be introduced to popularize the language. “Te Kohango Reo” or ‘Language Nests’ programme is considered to be one of the most successful language revitalization models in the world (Kirkness, 1998; McClutchie Mita, 2007) is successfully practiced in New Zealand. According to this, children need to be given an exclusively Tulu language immersion programme exclusively using the indigenous language as the vehicle of interaction and instruction. This programme could be included in revitalizing Tulu language. Though the oral language is slowly picking up the momentum towards progress, the script of Tulu language need to be popularized more



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through technology and online learning. It is our bounden duty and responsibility to see that our indigenous language will not disappear but will perpetuate into future generation.

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