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Multilingualism and language shift in South Africa: The case of Telugu, an Indian language

VARIJAKSHI PRABHAKARAN*

Abstract

In this article an attempt is made to demonstrate the intergenerational language shift of a sub-minority linguistic group, the immigrant Andhras, who speak Telugu as their home language, in a multilingual context in South Africa. The major part of the article focuses on the causes for bilingualism, multilingualism and language shift of the Andhras over the past 137 years in South Africa. The latter part of the article discusses the present status of the Telugu language in post-apartheid South Africa, the attitudes of the present-day immigrant Andhras towards their mother tongue, Telugu; the process of language shift from Telugu to English and the language change observed amongst the immigrant Andhra children.

1. Introduction

In this article an attempt is made to show the process of language shift from Telugu to English in South Africa, with special reference to the Andhra community. The term 'Andhra' refers to the Dravidian people who use Telugu as their mother tongue. The Andhras have migrated to various parts of the world over the last century, including South Africa. On 16 November 1860, when a steam paddler carrying 342 Indian immigrants from Madras arrived in Durban, the two major Dravidian languages, viz. Telugu and Tamil, entered the then Colony of Natal. Between 1860 and 1911 many Andhras immigrated and settled in South Africa.

The Andhras had to learn the various languages they came into contact with, e.g., English (for socio-economic reasons) and Tamil/Hindi and Zulu or Xhosa for intergroup communication. Subsequently, the Andhras became multilingual in these languages. Most of the present-day Andhras (like other South African Indians) have abandoned their ethnic mother tongue and

adopted English, using it in such domains as trade, science, technology, economics, education and the socio-political arena. Consequently, they have not transferred their mother tongue to the younger generation.

This paper aims to describe why and how the Andhras became bilingual in Telugu-English or multilingual in Telugu-English-Tamil/Hindi and Fanakalo or Zulu and how an intergenerational language shift towards the dominant language took and is taking place. The following sub-sections will describe the cycle of the language proficiency of the Andhras between 1860 and 1997, from monolingualism to multilingualism and back to monolingualism/bilingualism.

2. Bilingualism and language shift

The most salient feature of bilingualism according to Hoffmann (1991: 14) is that it is a multi-faceted phenomenon. Various linguists have defined the term *bilingualism* in various ways. Weinreich (1968: 1) describes bilingualism as the practice of alternately using two languages, and the person involved in this practice, as bilingual. Following Weinreich, William Mackey (1970: 555) states

It seems obvious that if we are to study the phenomenon of bilingualism we are forced to consider it as something entirely relative. We must moreover include the use not only of two languages, but of any number of languages. We shall therefore consider bilingualism as the alternate use of two or more languages by the same individual.

While discussing bilingualism Bloomfield (1933: 55-56) notes that

In the cases where this perfect foreign-language learning is not accompanied by loss of the native language, it results in bilingualism, native-like control of two languages. After early childhood few people have enough muscular and nervous freedom or enough opportunity and leisure to reach perfection in a foreign language... Of course, one cannot define a degree of perfection at which a good foreign speaker becomes a bilingual.

Although Bloomfield had a clear concept of bilingualism, his definition is problematic and has some degree of contradiction. If one cannot define 'a degree of perfection' in bilingualism, then how can one talk of perfect or near perfect foreign language learning? With regard to language shift, Fasold (1984: 207) defines it simply as 'the process of a community giving up a language completely in favour of another one'. He further states that 'when the shift occurs, the community has collectively chosen a new language where an old one was used before'. This statement is, however, misleading. Language shift should not be regarded as the community collectively choosing a new language, but, as a movement of conscious choice of the

individual and a society at large. Similarly Weinreich (1968: 79) defines language shift as 'the change from the habitual use of one language to that of another'.

Although there are no specific sets of predictable causes for the language shift of a speech community, sociolinguists group them roughly as follows: economic changes, status, demography, and institutional support (Fishman 1971; Fasold 1984; and Gal 1979). In the case of the Telugu language in South Africa, however, there are many other causes underlying the language shift as will be discussed later.

Causes for language shift are always numerous, sometimes interrelated, and vary from one situation to the other. Language shift occurs when a new language is acquired by a community with the gradual loss of its erstwhile primary language. When members of a community emigrate from one place to another, or from one country to another where they are exposed to a new language which has more speakers, social status or political status than that of their own mother tongue, the people usually shift their language to the dominant language of the new environment (e.g., the Surinamese in the Netherlands, the Tamils and Telugus in Malaysia, the Bhojpuris in South Africa). Similarly, military conquest and changes in the national boundaries can create ethno-linguistic minorities which are prone to language shift (Gal 1979: 3). Also, when a language has not received any official encouragement or ranks low in social status in the eyes of the community, as is the case for Indian languages in South Africa, the speakers of that language are prone to shift their mother tongue in favor of the dominant language (Prabhakaran 1998: 78).

It is usually observed that formerly viable and active speech communities, when deprived of their traditional land, resettle in a new land (such as the Norwegians in the United States) with other groups who might not always share the same language (unlike Srilankan Tamils settled in Tamilnadu, India). In such conditions they become minority groups in the new land. These minority groups, lacking political and economic power or a separate identity of their own, often undergo language shift.

The immigrants' mother tongue disappears because 'the community does not transfer it from one generation to the next' (cf. Prabhakaran 1992a: 168-169). For example, it is natural in the United States, Australia, and Canada for English to become the mother tongue for the descendants of immigrants in one or two generations (Lieberson and Curry 1971: 134). Similarly Pandit (1977: 9) notes that 'a second generation speaker in Europe or America gives up his native language in favour of the dominant language of the region; language shift is the norm and language maintenance an exception'.

In accordance with the 'bilingual functioning and domain overlap' theory of Fishman (1971: 306), in the first stage, the immigrant learns the new

language (in this case English) through his mother tongue (Telugu). At that stage, English is used only in a few domains where the mother tongue cannot be used. In the second stage, a larger number of immigrants know more English and can therefore speak to each other either in the mother tongue or in English. In the third stage, both the mother tongue and the acquired language function independently because at this stage, most of the immigrants are bilingual. In the fourth stage, however, the acquired language (English) displaces the mother tongue (Telugu) from all the domains of communication, and the mother tongue is mediated by English.

Drawing on the foregoing discussion, let us now discuss in detail some of the factors which have contributed first to bilingualism in Telugu and English and multilingualism in Telugu, English, Tamil and Fanakalo or Zulu; and then to language shift from Telugu to English in the Andhra community. The factors I shall focus on here include sociolinguistic, socio-economic, generational, political and other factors.

To determine to what extent these factors have contributed to bilingualism and language shift in the Andhra community, I have conducted a survey as well as personal interviews with various members of the Andhra community in and around Durban (KwaZulu-Natal), where the majority of the South African Indian population of one million resides. The participants in the survey include 146 Andhras from five generations of whom 79 are males (54.1 percent) and 67 are females (45.9 percent). Interviews were conducted with 52 Andhras including 28 males and 24 females. The data presented throughout this article comes from this research.

3. Determinants of bilingualism and multilingualism in the Andhra community

3.1 Sociolinguistic factors: Andhras' initial language problems

Most of the immigrant Andhras between 1860–1911 had a communication problem because they did not know any other language besides Telugu. Two examples taken from the KwaZulu-Natal Archives illustrate the kind of problem that arose.

The first is the case of a young Andhra woman named Gopi, from Vijayawada. On 9 November 1903, a letter was written to the Protector of Indian Immigrants from Argosy Mills in Thornville Junction, criticizing Nallagonda Gopi, depot no. 2206, who arrived in Natal in 1903, aged 27 (Source: Letter written to the Protector of Indian Immigrants Office – 9-11-1903/ No I. 2318/03 at KwaZulu-Natal Archives). The letter states that the lady is continuously crying and speaks a language (Telugu) and neither she

can understand the rest of the labourers in the mills nor they her. The other coolies (*cūlīs*) [a Telugu word which means 'labourers'] won't have anything to do with her. She cannot or won't work and she does not earn her ration'. The letter made an application to the authorities to transfer Gopi or put her in a place where there were others who spoke the same language i.e., Telugu. This is a striking example of the language problem and the alienation of the Andhra in a foreign environment. Gopi lost her employment, provisions and reputation because she could not communicate with others either in Tamil, Hindi or in English. Unfortunately there is no further documentation available on this Andhra woman in the KwaZulu-Natal Archives.

The second case is that of Soobadoo, an immigrant Andhra, who, in 1888, lost a court case, because Soobadoo could not communicate in Tamil or English. The court interpreter, who could converse only in Tamil, could not help the Telugu-speaking Andhra to obtain justice and Soobadoo lost his case against Veerasamy, a Tamil-speaking immigrant (Source: Document No – 141/1888 in KwaZulu-Natal Archives). His letter to the Supreme Court to reconsider his case was also not successful, because it was alleged that Soobadoo was deceiving the authorities by claiming that he could not understand Tamil.

Taking these two cases of the early immigrant Andhras as examples, we can speculate that many other Andhras had communication problems which must have made them realize the need to learn English for communication purposes. If they did not learn English within a few years of their arrival, they lagged behind their fellow immigrants. Thus, from their arrival in Natal, the Andhras experienced an urgent necessity to learn English. At the same time, they also needed to communicate with other Indians whose languages were very different from Telugu (and many are as dissimilar as chalk from cheese, each one with their own script). The Andhras, as immigrants, naturally spoke in Telugu, laughed in Telugu, joked in Telugu, shouted in Telugu, cursed in Telugu and even prayed in Telugu. When they arrived in Natal, almost all of them were monolingual in Telugu, except for those who could either speak a little Tamil or English. Over the years, however, many Andhras also learnt Zulu or Fanakalo for the purpose of communication with the other Indians and Zulus on the farms and subsequently became multilingual in Telugu, Tamil, Fanakalo and English.

3.2 Socio-economic factors

After their indentureship,² some free Andhras (who had completed their contract with their employers) found employment in tea factories, collieries and wattle plantations. Owing to their mastery of the English language, some

of the Andhras, after their indentureship, were appointed *sirdars* (super-visors) in the sugar mills where they had been previously employed.

Those early Andhra immigrants who were able to learn English quickly, were appointed to important jobs in the sugar mills. According to an interviewee, those Andhras who were tidy, neat and intelligent, became waiters, domestic gardeners and helpers in the kitchens of the English. Some of the Andhra women were employed as personal attendants to English women. Some men whose command of English, Hindi and Tamil was good, were appointed as interpreters or translators in the courts and in the government offices (Source: Minutes of Indian Immigration office - 141/1888 in KwaZulu-Natal Archives). This situation necessitated a sound command of spoken English, Tamil/Hindi and Telugu and encouraged bilingualism and multilingualism in the Andhra community.

Initially, the Andhras learnt a few English words which were necessary for communication with their employers and with other co-workers who hailed from different linguistic groups. According to Bughwan (1970: 12), the basic English vocabulary (e.g., simple verbs, numerals up to 10, a few nouns) was sufficient for the purpose of communicating with the employers. Some of the interviewees pointed out that many Indians learnt Fanakalo and used it for communication purposes with other linguistic groups, including their employers (cf. Mesthrie 1992: 309).

In later years the development of local industries, gold mining and agricultural plantations accelerated the commercial economy which increased the scope for government employment. To take advantage of these new developments, it became imperative to learn English rather than to remain a foreigner who spoke only Telugu. As a result, in later years as freed immigrants, the need to learn English for communication purposes became an economic and social issue.

Some of the Indians (in this case the Andhras) did not resist English; in fact some immigrant parents forced their children to learn English as soon as possible and discouraged them from learning Telugu or any other vernacular. Very few Andhras resisted the adoption of the English language (Prabhakaran 1998: 79). As Aziz (1988: 48) states, 'the resistance to English was, however, an individual effort' and as Bughwan notes (1970: 16), it was not a strenuous effort. This occurred largely because the social identity associated with English became more desirable for the Andhras during this period. Those who were proficient in English, made greater economic progress than the others in South Africa and even became models to be emulated in immigrant homes and immigrant organizations. At this stage, in consonance with Fishman's dictum (1971: 306), although bilingualism continued, the use of English became more dominant than that of Telugu. The immigrants, whose main concern was to identify with the dominant

socio-economic group, raised their children by communicating with them in the English medium (cf. Fishman 1966: 147). The Andhras of South Africa were no exception to this norm.

The Andhras who were more fluent in English became bilingual in Telugu and English, this phase being characteristic of the third stage of Fishman's model. At this juncture in the history of the Andhras in South Africa, both Telugu and English functioned independently.

3.3 Tamil domination

Another factor which facilitated the bilingualism and multilingualism of the Andhras was the necessity for the Andhras to learn Tamil. Being a minority surrounded by Tamils or Hindi-speakers, the Telugu-speakers were obliged to learn Tamil or Hindi in the early years of their 'barrack days'. Later generations also learnt Tamil and Hindi. This was demonstrated by the answers given to the question 'which language did/do your parents speak?'. Above 65 percent of the respondents reported that their parents can speak Telugu, Tamil, Hindi, Zulu (probably Fanakalo) along with English. When interviews were conducted with many important officials of the Andhra Maha Sabha of South Africa (the parent body of all the Andhras in South Africa) and elder members of the Andhra community in South Africa, they claimed that they could read, write, and converse in Tamil, Hindi and Zulu (Fanakalo). It is, however, interesting to note that the present-day younger generation can not read, write or communicate in any of these languages.

Having discussed the causes for the bilingualism and multilingualism of the Andhras, I shall now discuss the causes for the language shift towards English. These include generational factors, the power of English, political factors, the government's language policy, the Andhras' attitudes towards their mother tongue, and other factors.

4. Factors which influenced the language shift of the Andhras

In a stratified society like South Africa, the group's personal ambition to achieve socio-economic success is given more importance than EMT retention. This aspiration for personal advancement in a foreign environment was clearly a very significant factor which led the Andhras to abandon their mother tongue in favor of English.

4.1 Generation as a factor in Telugu language shift

A number of scholars (Fishman 1966, Vasikile 1988) have found that 'generation is the most important variable in the linear prediction of Ethnic Mother Tongue (EMT) retention' (Vasikile 1988: 63). In the opinion of Vasikile (and cf. Fishman 1966: 132), with each succeeding generation, there is less EMT retention.

Children are generally brought up in the social group to which their parents and immediate family circle belong. It is known that they learn the dialect and speaking styles and religio-cultural habits of that group in which they are born and raised. Their attitudes and subcultural behaviour traits are mostly influenced by the language they learn as children because that language is the storehouse of knowledge for that particular linguistic group. This learning of the mother tongue is largely an unconscious and involuntary process of acculturation.

The situation is not always the same, however, with every group of people. When immigrants arrive in a new environment, as a first generation, they earnestly try to retain their mother tongue, but, as Bughwan (1979: 480) states, faced by stark realities, they have to learn the dominant language of the new environment. As a minority group, they very soon realise that their mother tongue lacks social status in their new life and as a consequence, they neglect their mother tongue to the extent that they do not transfer it to their children.

The next generation, being more exposed to the newly acquired language, shows less EMT retention compared to the previous generation. Thus, with each succeeding generation the proficiency in the EMT disappears and the dominant language of the host country is more favored. This is true in the case of the immigrants in the United States (e.g., European immigrants from both majority and minority language groups), United Kingdom (Indian immigrants from India) and in South Africa.

As we will see later, responses to the questions 'How proficient are you in the Telugu language?' and 'How proficient are your parents and your children in the Telugu language?' (viz. the speaking, reading and writing efficiency of the respondents, their parents and their children in their mother tongue), clearly show that with each succeeding generation proficiency in speaking, reading and writing the Telugu language declines.

Figure 1 on the following page illustrates the speaking ability of the respondents, their parents and their children (three generations). It shows the deteriorating speaking ability of the Andhras as the generations progress. 65 percent of the respondents' parents can speak Telugu very well, 27.4 percent can speak fairly well and only 2.1 percent cannot speak Telugu at all. However, in the respondents' generation only 11 percent can speak Telugu

very well, 60.3 percent fairly well, but 26.7 percent cannot speak Telugu at all. Compared to these two generations, the respondents' children's generation shows further erosion in the ability to speak the language. In the children's generation only 2.7 percent of the children can speak Telugu very well, 20.5 percent fairly well, 34.2 percent did not answer and most of them, i.e., 42.5 percent, cannot speak Telugu at all.

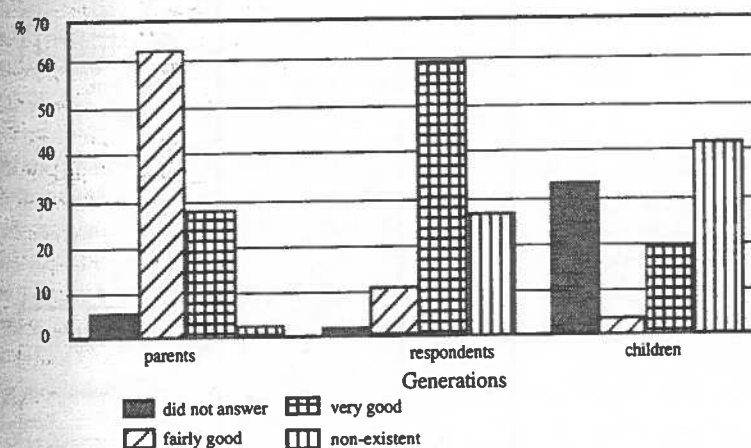


Figure 1. Telugu speaking abilities of the present-day Andhras

The reading and writing abilities of the three (parents, respondents and children) generations show even less retention of EMT (see Figures 2 and 3). 28.1 percent of the respondents' parents can read Telugu very well, 17.1 percent can read Telugu fairly well and 31.5 percent cannot read Telugu at all. However, only 9.6 percent of the respondents can read Telugu very well, 32.9 percent can read it fairly well but 45.2 percent cannot read Telugu at all. In the respondents' children's generation, only 1.4 percent can read Telugu very well, 17.8 percent fairly well, 39.7 percent cannot read Telugu at all.

Figures 1-3 clearly show that the respondent's parents' reading, speaking and writing skills in Telugu are much better than those of the respondents themselves, and the respondents' proficiency in the EMT is better than that of their children. The graphs also show that there is less retention of the EMT in the succeeding generations of the Andhra community. These findings are consistent with the opinions of Fishman (1966) and Vasikile (1988).

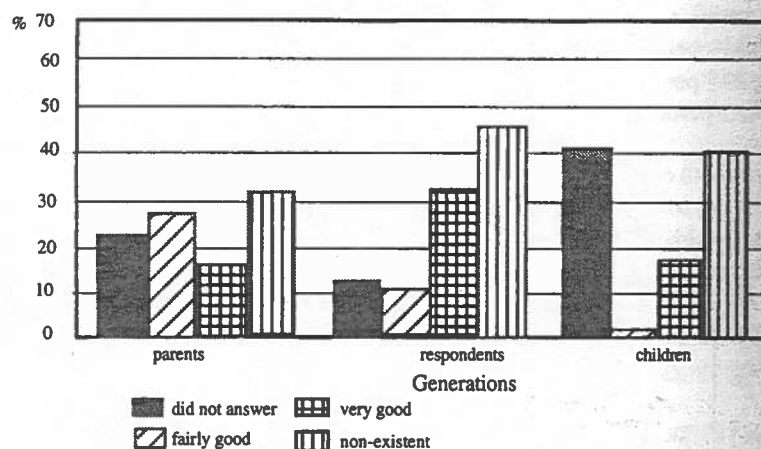


Figure 2. Telugu reading abilities of the present-day Andhras

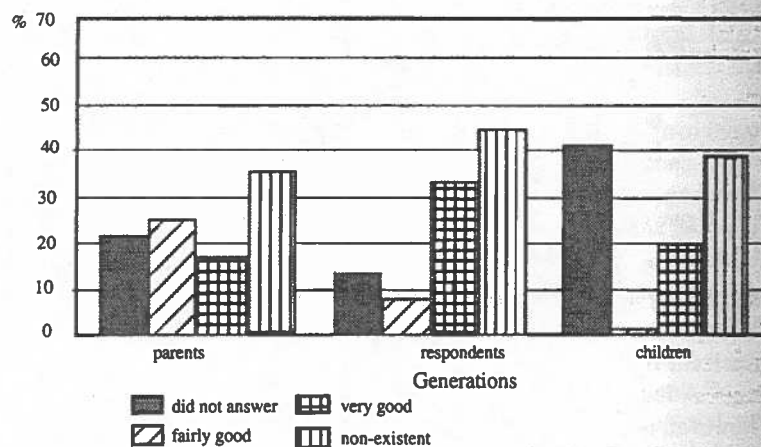


Figure 3. Telugu writing abilities of the present-day Andhras

4.2 The power of English

The most important factor which influenced the language shift towards English was the power of English as a dominant language. When the Andhras arrived in Natal in 1860 English was already very firmly established because of the arrival of the British immigrants to Natal in 1840. The very fact that

the indentured Andhras had English-speaking whites as their employers from the time of their arrival in South Africa, exerted great influence on the economic and social aspects of the lives of the Andhras. As years passed by, as shown earlier, the need for English as a means of communication in the commercial and social spheres increased.

Once the immigrant becomes bilingual, s/he is prone to shift his/her language in favor of the acquired language. Since there was no domain in which the non-English ethnic language (Telugu) alone was required for membership in the community, the later generation Andhra children, who had become bilingual in the family, increasingly became monolingual English speakers. Many elderly interviewees supported this by claiming that when they were young, their parents did not communicate with them in Telugu, but compelled them to speak only English. According to Thompson (1974: 58), at this stage of bilingualism the mother tongue usually disappears. These Andhras who gave up their mother tongue (Telugu) in favor of English display characteristics of language shift. According to Fasold (1984: 238), 'it is an unmistakable sign of language shift when bilingual parents pass on only one language to their children'. According to the interviews conducted in Natal, not even a single present-day Andhra in South Africa is monolingual in Telugu, but many are monolingual in English. In response to the question 'How often do you speak Telugu with your parents, spouse, siblings and children?' a very low incidence was recorded of the use of the Telugu language for the purpose of communication by the respondents (see table 1 below).

Table 1. Use of Telugu within the family circle

With grandparents	13.7%
With parents	17.4%
With elder members of the community	20.7%
With siblings	7.5%
With spouse	23.3%
With children	11.6%
With friends	14.3%
With Telugu school teacher	26.7%
With university Telugu lecturer	26.7%

4.3 Political factors

The political situation in South Africa after the Second World War also contributed to the erosion of Indian languages locally. Various oppressive laws were enacted to suppress the Indians in South Africa. The Indian

Government, which gained its independence from Britain in 1947, took up the matter of the segregation of the Indians, along with the issue of the ill-treatment of Indians in South Africa, with the United Nations and openly opposed South African political discrimination. With the National Party coming to power in South Africa in 1948 a new, much-hated and widely opposed system of segregation called 'Apartheid' was introduced in South Africa. In order to demonstrate its opposition to the political situation in South Africa, the Indian Government imposed political, economic, and cultural boycotts against the South African Government in 1948.

It is important to note that the intention of the Indian Government in imposing this boycott against South Africa, was not to punish the Indians in South Africa but to help the millions of South Africans by bringing pressure on the White Government to remove the various Apartheid laws. The Indians in South Africa did, however, suffer religio-culturally because of the ban on Indian trade with South Africa, since Indian goods could no longer flow freely into the South African market. Also language books, audio-visual tapes, prayer materials, religious books, and other religious literature were no longer imported into South Africa. Similarly, the arrival of priests and teachers, which was common before 1945, now completely ceased; and so did the import of brides from the Indian sub-continent.

Between the years 1860 and 1950, the Indian community in South Africa became well settled, being firmly established economically and religio-culturally. At the time of their arrival in South Africa, most of the Indians settled according to their castes and near their own linguistic groups, and thus created close-knit, socio-cultural units. The 'Ghetto Act' (1947) passed by the Smuts Government and the 'Group Areas Act' (1950), passed by the Malan Government both had very serious effects on the Indian community. The Group Areas Acts, Act 41 of 1950 and Act 77 of 1957, uprooted and dismantled the well-established Indian community.

When the government allocated new homes to the Indians no efforts were made to resettle people according to their linguistic groups. There were no attempts to preserve or co-locate established groups and communities. This disregard for social units produced alienation and the disintegration of group identity.

One of the common features of Indians in India is the maintenance of a joint family system. The Indians in South Africa maintained a joint family system for many decades until the 1960s. In such families the grandchildren are more exposed to their EMT due to their continuous interaction with the various members, and follow their religio-cultural traits. In the South African Indian context, however, several factors influenced the breakdown of the joint family system. External forces such as the socio-political and economic situation in South Africa undermined the traditional joint family system. The

small 'matchbox' homes provided by the Government after the Group Areas Acts indirectly led to the breakdown of the joint family system. The Indians, who used to live in a joint family system, were forced to leave their parents upon marriage. Thus, the grandchildren were deprived of their chance to learn their mother tongue from the older generation. Once the extended Indian families were disrupted and the members dispersed, the younger generation did not have the opportunity to communicate regularly in their EMT with elder family members.

4.4 Other factors

4.4.1 *Lack of educational facilities.* It is worth pointing out that the Telugu teacher in South Africa was an indentured laborer, not a qualified full-time educator. The students were mostly taught the Telugu alphabet, secondary forms of the vowels and the consonants and some songs and stories. No grammar or syntax rules were taught because there was no one academically qualified in Telugu. An Andhra, the late Mr. D. V. Naidoo, reported that they were not taught any grammar in Telugu (Source: Letter written by D. V. Naidoo on 14 December 1960). Owing to financial constraints and, in some cases, to their running away from India, many Andhras did not maintain any contact with their Indian relatives in the early immigrant period, nor did they have any incentive or ambition to import Telugu teaching material from India. Consequently, the syllabus at Telugu schools consisted mostly of recitation from memory.

In the initial stage of the patasala (Telugu private school) education the children were taught rudimentary English vocabulary. Within a few decades, however, Telugu was taught through the medium of English due to the Telugu language erosion and the language shift of the Andhras (Interview: Mr V. K. Naidoo 1991). In the later years patasala education was merely a process of teaching how to read and write Telugu. The teaching of other subjects such as Mathematics, History, etc. was not done through the medium of Telugu. Consequently, by the 1950s Telugu was taught as a second language to the Andhra students who were already exposed to English.

4.4.2 *Assimilation with Tamils.* One of the most important reasons for the shift and erosion of the Telugu language in South Africa is the unconscious assimilation of the Andhras with the Tamil community. The Tamil community, being the majority component of the Indian community, exerted great influence on the Andhras, a sub-minority within the minority Indian community in South Africa.

In the South African Indian context, the Andhras had assimilated with the Tamil-speaking Indians since their arrival in South Africa. According to many present-day Andhras, absorption with the Tamil-speaking people facilitated bilingualism and multilingualism of the Andhras but it gradually led to the loss of the use of Telugu (cf. Prabhakaran 1994a and 1994b).

4.4.3 *The nature of the Telugu language.* Another reason for the shift from and erosion of the Telugu language in South Africa is the flexibility of the Telugu language. Telugu absorbs words freely from other languages and makes use of them as if they were Telugu words. Since the beginning of its growth as a language, Telugu has absorbed many grammatical structures and lexical items from Sanskrit, Hindi, Tamil, Urdu and English, and it continues developing by borrowing from other languages as well. As Reddi (1985: iii) states, 'Telugu can assimilate the words of any language' into its vocabulary.

Like the Andhras elsewhere, the Andhras in South Africa also make use of 'loan words' in their daily usage, and to a great extent, Tamil predominates in conversation as shown in the following examples. In these examples, the Telugu words are set in italics and the Tamil loans are set in roman.

1. You know *repu ma sambandi vastunnadu*.
'Do you know that tomorrow our in-law is coming?'
2. *ayanku da nanu* murunga rasam and *iñji pachchadi vesi sapadu pedtanu*.
'I will serve (one kind of) tomato soup with drumsticks, and ginger chutney for his lunch.'
3. *repu da ma ammayi pelli nalungu*. You must come.
'Tomorrow itself is our daughter's wedding initiation. You must come.'

Borrowing has certainly contributed to the development of the Telugu language in India, but it is proving to be a serious barrier to the maintenance of the Telugu language in South Africa.³

4.5 *Government attitudes towards Indian languages*

4.5.1 *The education policy of the South African government.* The education policy of the South African Government also accelerated the language shift of the Andhras. The early indentured Andhras, like other Indians, imparted mostly religious knowledge and the Telugu language via the oral tradition in the form of discussion, narration and enacting incidents from the *Ramayanam*, the *Mahabharatam* (Hindu epics) and other Hindu *Sastras* (Prabhakaran 1992b: 124). During the indentured period the state made no

provision for Indian children to study their own language and culture (Hofmeyr and Oosthuizen 1979: 21). Some Indian children were admitted to white schools provided they appeared generally acceptable to the school authorities. The authorities insisted on western dress and general habits, which also implied insistence on the use of English. At this stage, as Hofmeyr and Oosthuizen state (1979: 21), 'Education was used as an instrument to destroy the customs of the Indian child'.

As a result of the Union of South Africa Act of 1909, English became one of the official languages, along with Dutch. Later, the Cape Town Agreement of 1927 made many tempting offers, such as Union citizenship to those Indians who followed western habits and way of life. The Indians who adopted western dress were given admission to the Government schools. The Cape Town Agreement of 1927, with its alluring promises, brought several changes in approach to the traditional culture of many of the Indians, including the Andhras. The promises made in this agreement provided sufficient incentive for many Andhras to abandon their mother tongue and Andhra culture in favor of English (cf. Bughwan 1970: 16-17 and Bhana and Pachai 1984: 242-243).

As recently as 1960 the main home language of the Indians was their own ethnic language. According to the 1960 census, 34,484 of the total South African Indian population spoke Telugu as their home language. The 1980 census, however, shows a decline in the number of Andhras with Telugu as their home language from 30,690 (1970) to 1,875. This is a striking indication of the language shift of the Andhras.

In 1983 many Indian community leaders of all linguistic groups brought pressure on the government to introduce Indian languages at state school level. Subsequently, after one hundred and twenty-four years of its existence in South Africa, Telugu, along with other Indian languages, was introduced in the state schools in 1984. However, the Indian Education Circular of 1984 (IE. Circular No. 51) stated that the teaching of any Indian language must be warranted by economic viability. That is only if 15 or more students were interested in learning an Indian language would that particular language be taught at the school concerned. Being a minority within the minority Indian community, already undergoing shift, the Telugu-speaking community could not provide the required number. Also at the time most Andhras had become apathetic towards their mother tongue because it had no commercial value, and did not further their political interests.

Between 1984 and 1994 was, however, an era of opportunity and a decade of language nurturing and maintenance for the Indian languages. Owing to its separate development policy, the National Party government established separate departments of Education and Culture for all the four racial groups. The Department of Indian Affairs, called the House of Delegates was

responsible for the promotion of Indian languages and culture. The House of Delegates appointed various language teachers both part-time and full-time, paid salaries according to their qualifications and experience; appointed language promoters to investigate the need for teaching Indian languages, to bring cultural awareness and propagate the importance of EMT retention and nurturing; and allocated separate budgets for buying teaching and learning audio-video materials. Funds were allocated for in-service workshops and orientation courses for full-time and part-time teachers. The House of Delegates also encouraged preparation and implementation of new syllabi to cater for the needs of teaching Indian languages in the state schools. The Department of Education and Culture under the House of Delegates even appointed language supervisors for each and every Indian language to supervise the teaching and learning systems in the state schools, to run examinations and to participate in the community cultural Eisteddfodau. This period suited the language loyalists very well.

The apathy of the parents, teachers and principals towards Indian languages restricted the growth of vernacular learning. Many Indians, who viewed this government support as a symbol of segregation and the apartheid regime, regarded the teachers, language promoters and supervisors as 'puppets' in the hands of the National Party government. They questioned and challenged the relevance of learning Indian languages in the South African context.

All these factors contributed to the language shift of the Andhras from Telugu to English before and during the apartheid era. In the following subsection I shall discuss the language shift of the Andhras during the post-apartheid era.

5. The new government and the Indian languages between 1994 and 1997

5.1 The transition period (1994–1995)

The Interim Constitution of the new South Africa was adopted in 1994 and several aspects of education and language issues were identified. In section 3, subsection 9c and 10d the Interim Constitution made special mention of the 11 official languages adding 9 indigenous languages to the two previous official languages, English and Afrikaans. At the same time the constitution stated that the Pan South African Language Board be established to promote the 11 official languages as well as minority languages such as German, Portuguese, the Indian languages, etc. When conferences were held to discuss proposals for the establishment of the Board, however, all the minority languages (both Foreign and Eastern) were totally ignored.

The new government's assurances as to the protection of Indian languages gave new hope to the language loyalists and the Indian community welcomed the government's new language policy. However, the question of economic viability, which had hindered the promotion of Indian languages during the apartheid era, also became the focus of the new government language policy in relation to Indian languages. The government stated that the class size of any Indian language should be not less than 20 and must be an economically viable unit. Any schools which did not have this required number for any Indian language were asked to cease offering tuition in such a language. Recommendations made by the provincial standing committee for Eastern languages, that less stringent norms should be applied in all Eastern languages and the minimum class unit should be brought to 8–10 pupils instead of 20, were not applied for any Indian language in any state school. Consequently many Indian language classes were shut down and this resulted in a considerable drop (from 44,744 to $\pm 32,000$) in numbers of students studying Indian languages between 1995–1997.

Most Indian parents forced their children to take Zulu instead of their EMT, especially as Zulu is the majority language in the KwaZulu-Natal province. This further contributed to the drop in the numbers of students studying Indian languages. Even at university level, due to the elevated status of the Zulu language, many part-time and full-time students cancelled their registration for Indian languages and preferred to take Zulu instead.

5.2 The new constitution and language-in-education policy

Building on the interim constitution, the new constitution has appointed a language board viz. the Pan South African Language Board, which must 'Promote and ensure respect for Languages, including German, Greek, Gujarati, Hindi, Portuguese, Tamil, Telugu, Urdu, and others commonly used by communities in South Africa' (Source: South African New Constitution adopted on 8 May 1996: 4).

This specific article demonstrates the South African government's 'tolerance-oriented' attitude towards minority linguistic groups rather than the 'promotion-oriented' attitude as proposed in the UN Declaration of linguistic minority Human Rights. The lack of government support in education is also contributing to the language shift of Telugu during the post-apartheid era.

Some of the main objectives of the government's language-in-education policy as stipulated in the new constitution are:

1. to establish additive multilingualism as an approach to language in education;

2. to support the teaching and learning of all other languages required by learners or used by communities in South Africa, including languages used for religious purposes, languages which are important for international trade and communication, and sign language.

Despite these objectives, the government has not given any support for the promotion of Indian languages in education.⁴ This has further contributed to the language shift from Telugu to English in the Andhra community. Many Andhras who were previously loyal to Telugu have started questioning the relevance of nurturing and maintaining the language for it has no future in the South African context. Interviews conducted in the post-apartheid era reveal that the Andhras have negative attitude towards Telugu as shown in these statements: 'Why should I force my children to learn Telugu which has no socio-economic and political status in our new South Africa? There are no job opportunities for them. If they learn Zulu ... they may have more advantages in future ...'; 'What are they going to gain by learning Telugu?' and 'Is it not waste of time to force our children to learn Telugu?'

6. The present-day immigrant Andhra situation

In this sub-section I would like to discuss briefly the bilingualism and the language shift of the present-day Andhra immigrants who speak Indian Telugu as their home language in the South African situation.

Since the early 1980s Indian Telugu speakers of various castes have immigrated to South Africa (firstly to the four former homelands and then after the formation of new South Africa they became citizens or residents of the Republic of South Africa). These new immigrants who are either 'technocrats' or 'professionals' are highly qualified and are bilingual in Indian Telugu and English; some of them are multilingual in Indian Telugu, English and other Indian languages (e.g., Hindi, Kannada or Tamil). They speak English at work but interact in Telugu at home with some of their dependents especially wives or elderly mothers and young children most of whom are monolingual in Telugu.

Despite this pattern of language use at home, language shift towards English is fast taking place for both the educated and uneducated Telugu immigrants. Conspicuous English usage in the home domain is noticed and some couples, who have different mother tongues due to intermarriages, are raising their South African born children in English. I have studied 11 such immigrant Indian Telugu-speaking children and their parents in the post-apartheid era and observed the following gradual changes in their attitudes and speech patterns.

6.1 Linguistic changes

6.1.1 *Phonetic changes.* Aspiration is a common feature of high and middle castes in Andhra Pradesh, India. An Indian Telugu speaker would recognize another Indian Telugu speaker's caste due to the presence of certain linguistic features such as aspiration. The educated lower caste people tend to use this feature as a marker of upward social mobility. In the immigrant situation, however, younger generation has no caste consciousness and therefore aspiration is rarely found and almost absent in their speech. This is observed in the following examples. The term *bhayam* 'fear' is pronounced as *bayam*; *khuni* 'murder' as *kuni*; *badha* 'pain' as *bada*; and *dhanam* 'wealth' as *dham*.

6.1.2 Lexical changes

6.1.2.1. Polite terms and third person pronouns. Polite terms and third person pronouns for masculine and feminine gender are gradually disappearing and are replaced by impolite terms in the speech of present-day Andhra children. For example, the younger generation of Andhras tend to substitute or replace the third person masculine Indian Telugu polite terms *varu* and *ayana* 'he' with the impolite terms *atanu* and *vadu*. Similarly, the third person feminine polite Indian Telugu terms *avida* (very polite) *ame* (polite) 'she' have now been replaced by *ame* (rarely) and *adi* (always) (without respect). Other politeness terms, such as *tamaru* (second person very polite term) and *avida* have become obsolete in the immigrant children's speech.

6.1.2.2 Loss of kinship terms. Indian Telugu has more than 18 close kinship terms and it has different vocabulary for maternal and paternal grandparents, uncles, aunts and cousins. For example, maternal grandmother is *ammamma* and maternal aunts are *peddamma* ('mother's elder sister') and *cinnamma* ('mother's younger sister'). Similarly, paternal grandmother is *bamma* or *nayamma* and aunts are *peddatta* and *cinnatta* for father's elder and younger sisters respectively. In the South African context some of these kinship terms are already obsolete and many young immigrant Telugu children just say 'granny', 'aunty', and 'uncle'.

6.1.2.3 Loss of caste terminologies. The Telugu community in India consists of various castes and sub-castes (e.g., *brahman*, *komati*, *telaga*, *kapu*, *sarabu*, *vadrangi*, *eta*, *mangali*, and others). The immigrant Andhra children are not aware of the Indian caste system and as a result this terminology and the caste hierarchy are not known to these children.

6.1.2.4 Loss of plural forms and honorific terms. For example, the Indian Telugu term *miru* 'you' a plural form to indicate respect (even addressing a single person) is gradually being replaced with the term *nuvvu*, a singular form which denotes no respect but still means 'you'.

7. Conclusion

In this article I have shown that various factors have contributed to the shift of the Telugu language in South Africa. The main causes are the dominant official status of the English language, the Government language policy, the assimilation between the Andhras and the Tamils and political factors such as the uprooting of the well settled Andhra community by the Group Areas Act. The Andhra's negative attitude towards their own language should also not be overlooked.

The whole Andhra community did not make any serious efforts to save their mother tongue from attrition, but left this responsibility to a small number of 'custodians' who tried or are trying to preserve and propagate the language. Those who can speak the language have a very low opinion of it as was evident from the responses in the interviews. Many claim that the Telugu they speak is 'Kitchen Telugu' (cf. Mesthrie 1985: 166) and do not show any respect for or pride in the language.

There is no appreciation of the language because it is not used for regular communication purposes in South Africa today. For many years the Andhras, along with the other Indians in South Africa, were regarded as the 'Coolies' and their language was wrongly branded as 'Coolie language' by the Africans as well as the Europeans. After their indentureship the socio-economic status of the Indians changed but it took many years for the South African community to discontinue referring to the Indians, including the Andhras, as 'Coolies'. Some of the present-day Andhras have a low esteem for the Telugu language because it was associated with the word 'Coolie' and hence they avoided the use of the language (see: interview findings). The attitude adopted by the elderly and youth throughout KwaZulu-Natal was a very apologetic one, comments like the following being very common to most of the Indian linguistic groups: 'We speak a broken Telugu ...'; 'what we speak is a kitchen Telugu ... it is not so good compared to your (Indian) Telugu ...'; 'oh, we learnt only kitchen Telugu from our forefathers because they are not educated in proper Telugu ...'; 'our Telugu is mixed and being a coolie language it is corrupted ... and to learn it is waste of time'; 'do you know that the Africans and the Gujarati-speakers call our language a coolie language? That is why my parents did not want to teach it to me when I was young'. It is interesting to note that although Telugu with its millions of

speakers has prestige in India, it has no socio-economic status in South Africa.

While discussing the causes for the decline of Bhojpuri, Mesthrie (1985: 165) attributes a lack of prestige as one of the causes for Bhojpuri erosion in South Africa. He states (1985: 166):

While the prestige of Hindi is to be expected, the accompanying negative attitude towards SABh (South African Bhojpuri) is surprising in its intensity and pervasiveness. The average native speaker's knowledge of the background to his language is, not surprisingly, nil. Lacking a strong tradition and education associations, Bhojpuri is disparaged by its own speakers – lay and learned alike – as being not just a poor, second-cousin to standard Hindi, but a debased form of it, lacking the subtleties of grammar and a sophisticated vocabulary. The attitude by elderly and youthful speakers throughout Natal was a uniformly apologetic one.

Mesthrie's comments not only summarise the situation of Bhojpuri in South Africa, but also the status of the Telugu language amongst the present-day Andhras in the country. It is evident that the Telugu language is being gradually eroded in South Africa. As Bughwan (1970) and Aziz (1988) show, along with the other Indian languages, Telugu is markedly on the decline. However, rather than become obsolete in South Africa, the language is kept alive in religio-cultural activities such as the Andhra *eisteddfod* (national religio-cultural annual event), Andhra *Ugadi* (Telugu New Year) celebrations, and weekly Hindu religious services and prayers, which are practised in the South African Andhra community.

University of Durban-Westville

Notes

* Varjaskshi Prabhakaran, Department of Indian Languages, University of Durban-Westville, Private Bag X54001, Durban, South Africa, e-mail: <varija@pixie.udw.ac.za>.

1. I would like to thank the editor of this volume, Nkonko M. Kamwangamalu, for useful comments on earlier versions of this article. Any remaining errors or weaknesses are solely mine.
2. The Andhras were brought into the colony of Natal to work as indentured laborers (*culis*) on the sugar-cane farms. Initially they were contracted to specific employers for a period of five years and later the contract was extended to a period of ten years. Many employers treated them very harshly as slaves.
3. It is ironical to note that it is this facet of Telugu which has led to its growth rather than its decline in the Indian sub-continent.
4. In the school situation, Indian languages are not compulsory subjects, are grouped along with various extra curricular subjects and are given three periods per week (i.e., one and a half hours per week), which is not sufficient.

5. The Indian term coolie (*culi*) means 'labourer' or 'labour charges' and is widely used in many Indian languages such as Telugu, Tamil, and Hindi. However, due to its negative connotation in the South African Indian context, it is regarded as taboo to use this term.

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