

How Does a Language Become Social and Cultural Identity for the Members of Syed Speech Community in Aligarh: A Case Study

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Abstract

The main aim of the study focuses on the particular style of speaking by the members of Syed speech community. This study also explains how members of Syed speech community maintain their identity on different linguistic levels.

This is a pilot research because it focuses a small group of people who belongs to a particular speech community among the Muslims.

The objective of the study is to show that how they people are linguistically marked amongst the Muslims which they are living with them but Syeds occupy a special place because of some phonological distinctive features.

Keywords: Syed speech community, social identity, cultural identity, Aligarh

Methodology

The method which is used in this research is an observational method. Participant are being observed by the Investigator in different social domains.

Data Collection

This study was conducted in February 2018. It took six month span to complete the survey. Method which was used for the purpose of collecting the data is Labov's Observer paradox. Fifty informants participated in this study, twenty five males and twenty five females. The tools which were used in the field are as follows:

1. Selection of the informant was not random; there were selected group of people who belong to a particular community.
2. Direct and indirect conversation.
3. Telephonic conversation.

4. Meetings in religious or marriage ceremony.
5. Direct observation method, people were observed by the observer when they don't know that they are being observed.

Data Analysis

Data is recorded by the investigator with the help of tape recorder. After listening again and again to find out what are the peculiarities of their speech to make them different among the Muslims as whole.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of the present study is to highlight the linguistic features of a particular speech community.

- Another objective of my research is to show the linguistic identity of a particular speech community in Aligarh.
- The topic has not been taken yet.

Background

- **Historical Background:** Some historical facts about the Syed families are:
 - They have well-recorded history of kinship relationship to the Qabila-e-Banu Hashim in Saudi Arabia. They have a great command over the language before and after Islam.
 - They occupy a very important post called Servant of Khana-e-Kaba which uplifts their social status amongst the Muslims across the globe.

Introduction

- Syed Speech Community in Aligarh: A group of people who have come from the different parts of the country live together and share a common language in their community because they maintain their identity.
- They share a common culture and religious beliefs.
- They are surrounded by different speech communities and languages such as Hindi, Urdu, English, Hindustani and the most important dialect is Braj.

Speech Community

Regardless of the linguistic differences among them, the speech varieties employed within a speech community form a system because they are related to a shared set of social norms (Gumperz 1964).

- Labov (1972: 120-1) The speech community is not defined by any marked agreement in the usage of language elements, so much as by participation in a set of shared norms: these norms may be observed in overt types of evaluative behavior, and by the uniformity of abstract patterns of variation which are invariant in respect to particular levels of usage.

Identity

I think this is not an easy question. Identity is a very packed term that, apart from its literal meaning, can have a lot of connotations. Every person has some personal identity, as well as social and cultural identity, which means that they identify with or follow some specific values, traditions and points of view, not necessarily at the conscious level. As a student of linguistics, I should also point out that *Linguistic Identity* defines us as a language user belonging to a particular speech community. Apart from this, we may also identify ourselves as belonging to a professional group, family background and as individuals who with our own unique way of expressing ourselves.



There are other identity markers also according to what we have in common. For example, nationality, locality, religion, ethnicity, etc.

- Henri Tajfel and John Turner state that “social identity theory states that the in-group will discriminate against out group to enhance their self-image.”
- In-group means “us”
- Out-group means “them”
- According to Hogg & Abrams, self-categorization and social comparison produce different consequences. The social categories that individuals place themselves in are designed and constructed by the society and exist only in relation to other contrasting categories.

Cultural Identity

- (Kohls, 1996) defines culture as an integrated system of learned behavior patterns that are characteristics of the members of any given society. Culture refers to the

total way of life of a particular group of people. It includes everything what a group of people thinks, says, does and makes, in addition to its systems of attitudes and feelings. Culture is learned and transmitted from generation to generation.

Linguistic Identity of Syed Speech Community

Some important characteristics of Syed family are as follows. These features include their linguistic identity amongst the different groups. Through this linguistic identity they recognize themselves and are recognized by others. Through these features some unique identification in a society is attached to them. A very common sentence which has been used for a long, long, time by the Muslims for Syed's family is "**ye to bhai sheen qaaf wale log hain**". This expression tells us many linguistic and non-linguistic meanings.

Some Expressions are used by the Common Muslims in Aligarh

- AsslamuAlai Kum
- AsslawaleKum
- Saam ale Kum
- SaaliKum
- Shukriya
- Thanks
- KhudaHafiz
- Allah Hafiz

Above expressions are very much frequently used by different speech communities.

Some Verbal Expressions which are used by Syed's group. But these are phonetically and syntactically marked.

- AsslamuAlai KumWa RahmatullhiWa Bara Katuhu
- Al Ham Du Lillah
- JazaKumullahKahir
- Masha Allah
- One thing is very important when the members of Syed speech community meet together and depart, they use only one expression for both the situations "**Asslamualaikumwarahmatullahiwabarakatuhu**".

Some special features by which Syed members are different from other groups of Muslims

- Physically and phonetically demonstrated Politeness
- Pronunciation

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- Place of articulation
- Lexical selection
- Syntactic pattern
- Non-verbal signs

Politeness

When they communicate with the in-group and out-group, they show the highest degree of politeness. They are very polite in nature never show any anger. They believe in peace and love and show sympathy always towards the others. They also respect the other's belief.

Pronunciation

They are very highly conscious about the pronunciation of the word. Incorrect pronunciation of the word is not acceptable within this group.

These are the homophonous sounds, for non-Syed members there is no difference, but it matters for the members of the Syed speech community.

Syntactic Pattern

One very important factor of the members of Syed speech community is that they have only one expression for both singular as well as plural, which is “**həm**” and it is a marked term for the members of Syed speech community.

- Some nonverbal signs
- Facial expression
- Gestures.

Conclusion

Now on the basis of above discussion, it is clear that some characteristics of Syed family give them a linguistic identity amongst the different groups of people. The Syed community members recognize that these features give them distinct identity. Non-Syed community members also recognize these features as unique identification for the members of the Syed community. Not only language but other features are observed.

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