

Semantic Analysis of the Suffixed Verbs and Postpositions in Expressing Politeness With Special Reference to Eranad Dialect of Malayalam

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Abstract

Though the phonological and morphological features of Eranad Dialect have been well documented (Panikkar, G, K 1978, Sreenathan, M. et al 2015), the semantic value of the words, phrases, and particles peculiar to this dialect has been little explored. This paper is based on the semantic analysis of the suffixed verbs and post positions for expressing politeness in Eranad Dialect of Malayalam. The data for the study was collected as part of the Dialect Survey conducted by Thunchath Ezhuthachan Malayalam University. The study evaluates the peculiarities of the suffixed verbs and postposition (eg /koṇḍōri/ (bring IMP-honorific and polite) v/s /koṇḍa/ (bring IMP - impolite)) used as a politeness strategy and compares them with the equivalent linguistic forms in Standard Malayalam. The contextual analysis of such linguistic forms was done to elicit its semantic value. The study also explored whether such suffixed verbs or postpositions alien to Standard Malayalam and other dialect of Malayalam was formed independently or as a result of phonological modifications in the existing root words (Eg. /poikkō[ʃi]/ < /pōykkō[ʃiin]/ (may go) = /pōy/ + /ko[ʃ]/ + -iin with honorific plural marker). The also study identifies the lexical options of the speakers for polite/impolite strategy (Eg. The verb roots like /koṇḍə/ (give), /kāṭṭə/ (give) are impolite than /tarə/ (give)). The analysis reveals that the Eranad dialect of Malappuram has devised its own linguistic pattern in expressing politeness. This paper also concludes that it is as a result of peculiar phonological and morphophonemic processes, drastic changes occurred in the surface structure of many of these linguistic forms and the root of such forms of suffixed verbs and postpositions are difficult to be identified. In the present study such linguistic forms are termed as ‘Metamorphic Expressions’. The phonological process in the formation of these linguistic forms and its contextual semantic values are analysed in order to bring new lights in understanding linguistic features of Eranad dialect in general and the politeness strategy of this dialect.

Keywords: Malayalam, Eranad Dialect, Politeness, suffixed verbs, post positions, metamorphic expressions, small quantity quantifiers

Politeness theories proposed by Goffman (1967), Lakoff (1973), Brown and Levinson (1978), Fraser (1980), and Leach (1983) generally focus on the way people choose the linguistic forms to protect their faces during conversations. Most of the theories on politeness

drawn largely from Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principles that involves four maxims. From this principle Lakoff (1973) derives two rules of conversation (be polite and be clear) and proposes a cline of linguistic politeness i.e. formal politeness- informal politeness-intimate politeness. Leach's (1983) politeness principles identify six maxims (the tact maxim, the generosity maxim, the approbation maxim, the modesty maxim, the agreement maxim, and the sympathy maxim). Brown and Levinson's theory can be treated as an extension of Grice's Cooperative Principle, in which they proposed that the face protection is an important strategy in all social interactions using language. For them "Face is the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself (Brown and Levinson: 1987)". They argue that people keep respects in their interaction to avoid threat between speakers and the hearers and identify positive and negative politeness. Brown and Levinson also identify the social variables that determine the kind of politeness starters used. They are Social Distance (SD), Power (P), and Rank of Position (R). As Kapser (1990) observes the theories of Goffman (1967), Lakoff (1973), Brown and Levinson (1978), Fraser and Nolen (1981), and Leach (1983) unanimously conceptualize politeness a strategic conflict avoidance. All these theories provide broad frameworks with which linguistic strategies of politeness could be studied cross linguistically. In the present paper I explore the politeness structure in Eranad Dialect of Malayalam by analysing the politeness markers at morphological and syntactic levels.

The Dialect Under Study

The dialect area under study lies in the Eranad Taluk of Malappuram district in Kerala. M V Sreedhar (1964) had made a glimpse into the phonemic, Morphemic and Phrase Structure of Eranad dialect as part of analysing Malabari dialect of Malayalam. However, it was Panikkar (1973) who made a detailed descriptive study on Phonological and Morphological features of Eranad dialect of Malayalam. Compared to other dialects and standard Malayalam, Eranad dialect keeps its identity with the features like absence of the palatal retroflex lateral /ɺ/absence of the retroflex and palatal fricatives /ʃ/and /ʒ/, absence of aspirated stops, presence of labiodental fricative /f/, -əŋə as the present tense marker, high frequency of the verbal noun markers -al, and absence of verbal participle forms with-a:ru (ka:ŋa:rə, po:ka:rə etc). As attested by Panikkar (1973) the frequencies of Arabic loan words are higher in this dialect, but Sanskrit loan words are a lesser when compared to the dialects of the forward Hindus. Neither of the studies explored the semantic values of the suffixed verbs and post positions for expressing politeness in Eranad Dialect of Malayalam. Sreenathan et al (2016) attempted a sample survey on Malappuram dialect of Malayalam which entails Eranad. It lacks an in-depth analysis of the peculiar linguistic behaviours of this dialect.

Lexical Politeness in Eranad Dialect

Honorific Degrees Expressed Through Lexemes

1. A: *ante* *pe:na* *inkkə* *ka:ttə* (Impolite)
 2SG.POS pen 1SG.DAT give IMP
 'Give me your pen'

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- B: *ante pe:na inkkə koŋʃa* (impolite)
2SG.POS pen 1SG.DAT give IMP
'Give me your pen'
- C: *iŋŋa[ə pe:na inkkə tari* (polite)
2SG.HON.POS pen 1SG.DAT give IMP.POL
'Give me your pen'
- D: *ninte pe:na enikkə taru:* (polite neutral in Standard Malayalam)
2SG.POS pen 1SG.DAT give IMP.POL
'Give me your pen'
- E: *niŋŋa[ə pe:na enikkə taru-mo:~tara: mo?* (more polite)
2SG.POS pen 1SG.DAT give IMP INT.POL
'Could you please give me your pen'
2. A: *ni: po:* (impolite)
2.SG go
'you go'
- B: *niŋŋa[ə poj-kko:li* (polite)
2.SG.HON go IMP may POL
3. A: *o:lə doctor a:ŋə* (impolite and less honour)
3.SIG.F doctor is
'she is a doctor'
- B: *o:n doctor a:ŋə* (impolite and less honour)
3.SIG.M doctor is
'he is a doctor'
- C: *o:lə doctor a:ŋə* (Polite and honour)
she/he POL doctor is
's/he is a doctor'

At lexical level, a few lexemes have semantic role in expressing politeness and impoliteness. Among them the role of honorific pronouns, pronouns for address and reference like *niŋŋa[~iŋŋa]*, *avar>o:rə~o:lə*, *mu:pparə*, *mu:ppatti* are important. Some of them are common in other dialects of Malayalam as well. The honorific pronoun *ta:nka[* the most formal usage in Standard Malayalam, is absent in this dialect.

The 1 to 3 sets of sentences show the role pronouns in politeness strategy. *ante*, *ni:* are generally used in the context when the degree of formality is zero and the degree of familiarity is higher. However, it is sometimes used as 'angry words' even when the degree of formality is higher, and the degree of familiarity is lesser. Consequently, it leads to Face Threatening Act (FTA). As Brown and Levinson pointed out Social Distance (SD), Power (P), and Rank of Position (R) determines the linguistic behaviour in expressing politeness. It is evident in Eranad dialect as well as -ante, and -ni: are less polite than *niŋŋa[* and *niŋŋa[ə* and its choice depends on SD, P, and R factors. In the set 3 *olə* is an honorific and gender neuter pronoun that shows speaker's respect towards the one who is referred.

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There some lexeme other than pronouns that subtly express the degree of politeness. In the set 1, the contextual meaning of *ka:ttə*, *konʃa*, and *tarə* are same. However *tarə* sounds more polite to native speakers and they prefer it to the other two while converse with elders and strangers.

onnə, ittiri, oəittiri, kuraccə, le:ʃam, orə

4. A: *onnə ni:ŋa:mo?* (more polite)
one INT. move could
'Could you move a bit?'
B: *ni:ŋa:mo?* (polite)
move can
'Can you move?'
5. A: *ittiri ni:ŋa:mo?* (more polite)
a little. INT move could
'Could you please move a little?'
B: *ni:ŋi irikka:mo?* (polite)
move sit can
'Can you move?'
6. A: *orittiri ni:ŋi irikka:mo?* (more polite)
a little.INT move sit could
'Could you please move a little?'
B: *ni:ŋi irikka:mo?* (polite)
move sit can
'Can you move?'
7. A: *kuraccə ni:ŋuo?* (more polite)
A little INT. move sit can
'Can you move?'
B: *aŋŋo:ttə ni:ŋuo?* (polite)
there move can
'Can you move there'
8. A: *le:ʃam ni:ŋi nilkkuo?* (more polite)
Some.INT move stand can
'Can you move a little?'
B: *aŋŋo:ttə ni:ŋi nilkkuo?* (polite)
there move
'Can you move there'
9. A: *orə ma:ŋa taruo?* (more polite)
One.INT mango give
'Can you give a mango?'
B: *a: ma:ŋa taru* (polite)
mango give

‘give me a mango’

Among the pairs of sentence from 4 to 9 that express polite requests, the one with quantifiers like *onnə* (one), *ittiri* (some), *orittiri* (a little), *kuraccə* (some), *le:ʃʌm* (a small amount), *orə* (one) are more polite than the one without them. All these quantifiers are ‘quantifiers to express small quantity’ that reflect humbleness in politeness contexts.

10. *iŋŋa|e* *pe:na onnə* *inkkə tarumo:~tara:mo?* (highly polite)

2SG.HON.POS pen one INT me give could you please

‘Could you please give me your pen?’

11. *iŋŋa|e* *pe:na inkkə onnə tarumo:~tara:mo?* (highly polite)

2SG.HON.POS pen me one INT give could you please

‘Could you please give me your pen?’

In 10 and 11 *-onnə* is added either with the pronoun or verb as an intensifier of the politeness.

Based on the above analysis it is found that the lexical choice at paradigmatic level in Eranad dialect of Kerala determines an utterance polite or impolite or the degree of politeness. The ‘quantifiers to express small quantity’ used at syntagmatic level of the sentences constructed for request, increase the degree of politeness.

Bound Morphemes and Politeness

Though the lexeme-politeness correspondence is limited to the type of pronouns used, the morphological choices in verbs clearly indicate the degree of politeness and impoliteness. In the sentences 1 to 3, the root form of verbs are used (*ka:ttə*, *va (konṭə+va)*, *ta:*) as ‘the bald on record’ (see Brown and Levinson) strategy. In the extremely informal situations like the conversation among close friends, siblings, between parents and children, elder and younger close relatives; it does not result in FTA. The same morphological choice was in practice in the earlier caste based social hierarchy prevailed in the area which is now absent at the surface social structure. Age was not a variable in that system and the notion of elder-younger was irrelevant when a higher caste address the lower caste. Now in formal social situations, standardized neutral forms are preferred and the verb forms used in 1 to 3 are treated abusive and lead to FTA.

In 5 to 6, the verbs and post positions are suffixed with the morpheme *-u:* that make the usage more polite and acceptable in formal situations where people tend to use standard form of Malayalam. The sentence 1E is more formal and polite and is more or less similar to the construction ‘could you please.....’ 1D, 1E are frequent only in Standard Malayalam used in formal situations.

Polite and Impolite Morphemes

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-ə and -i

In Eranad dialect, one of the ways to express politeness is the morphological choice of verb forms as find in the sentence C. The bound morpheme –i suffixed with the verb *tarə* clearly indicates politeness in this dialect. Unlike 1A, and 1B, the sentence 1C is used when a younger converse with an elder and one happened to talk with a stranger.

Actually, the morpheme –i could be the contracted form of the imperative marker –*in* ~ *i:n* ~ *vi:n* which is now less frequent in Standard Malayalam and rarely appear in literature.

taruvi:n (*taru + i:n*) > *tari:n* > *tari:* > *tari* (give IMP – polite)

kodukkuvu:n (*kodukku + i:n*) > *kodukkin* > *kodukki* (give IMP – polite)

12. A: *atə aviṭe vekkə* (impolite)

That there put

‘Keep/put it there.’

B: *atə aviṭe vekki* (polite)

That there put POL

‘Keep/put it there.’

13. A: *citrattile:kkə nokkə* (impolite)

To picture look

‘Look at the picture’

B: *citrattile:kkə no:kki* (polite)

To picture look POL

‘Look at the picture’

The degree of politeness in the pairs of 12 and 13 is determined by the bound morphemes suffixed with the verb. A contrast can be identified between vowel morpheme –i and –ə in the pairs. –ə is preferred in the extremely informal situations like the conversation among close friends, siblings, between parents and children, elder and younger close relatives and –i is preferred in the situations where more honour and politeness have to be expressed.

In Eranad dialect the suffixed –ə could be the variant form of –u: (*koṭukku:* > *koṭukku*), the neuter imperative marker and –i could be the variant form of the polite imperative marker –i:n. However in Eranad dialect –ə suffixed verb is –polite and –i suffixed verb is +polite.

-a and –i

14. A: *a: bukkə eṭutta:* (impolite)

That book take (for me)

‘Get that book (for me)’

B: *a: bukkə eṭukki* (polite)

That book take POL (for me)

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- ‘take that book’
15. A: *a: cittram ka:ttij-a:* (impolite)
That picture show POL
‘Show that picture’
- B: *a: cittram onnə ka:ɳikki* (polite)
That picture one show POL
‘please show that picture’
16. A: *itə piɳicca:* (impolite)
this keep
‘keep this’
- B: *itə onnə piɳikki* (polite)
this one keep POL
‘please keep this’

In the above pairs of sentences –ə or –i are added with the verbs ending with the link morphemes –kkə and –ccə. In these contexts the –ə and –i have semantic value of politeness. –a is –polite and –u: is +polite.

-o:/i and -a:/a

17. A: *niɳɳa[pojkko:/i* (polite)
you go POL
‘you may go’
- B: *ni: pojkka:/a* (impolite)
you go
‘you go’
18. A: *atə eɳutto:/i* (polite)
That take may (you)
‘you may take POL’
- B: *atə eɳutta:/a* (impolite)
that take (you)
‘you take that’.
19. A: *itə koɳutto:/i* (polite)
This give POL
‘you may give this.’
- B: *itə koɳutta:/a* (impolite)
This give (you)
‘you give this.’
20. A: *niɳɳa[pojkko:/i* (polite)
You go POL
‘you may go.’
- B: *ni: pojkka:/a* (impolite)
You go

‘you go.’

In the 17 to 20 pairs of sentences the suffixed morphemes with the verbs are either –*o:/i* or –*a:/a*. –*o:/i* is +polite and *a:/a* is –polite. Like other morpheme the choice is depended on SD, P, and R variables.

–*o:/i* and –*a:/a* might be derived in the following way.

a) –*ko/vi:n* (*ko/+i:n*)>*ko//in*>*ko:/in*>*o:/i* (From the marker for imperative mood)

b) –*ka/a>a/a>a:/a* (–*ka/a* has several other semantic function in both Standard Malayalam and Eranad dialect of Malayalam)

Semantically –*ko/* and *ka/a* are the highly productive suffixed verbs that contribute subtle meaning differences in different contexts. Since –*o:/i* might be derived from –*ko/vi:n*, the politeness part of this morphemic cluster is –*i:n~in~vi:n*, for they are historically honorific markers that are not frequent in standard Malayalam and other dialects of Malayalam. Hence, it can be treated as the retention of an old linguistic feature in Eranad dialect. The sentences in 1D generally used in Standard Malayalam and in formal contexts. The politeness element in that sentence is neutral and has zero degree of politeness i.e. neither polite nor impolite.

–*a: v/s* –*a:ŋi*

21. A: *atə eʃutta:*

That take
‘Take that.’

B: *atə eʃutta:ŋi* (polite)

That take POL
‘please take that.’

22. A: *iviʃe va:*

Here come
‘come here’

B: *iviʃe vanna:ŋi* (polite)

here come POL
‘please come here.’

23. A: *ni: po:*

you go
‘go’

B: *niŋŋa/ poja:ŋi* (polite)

you go POL
‘please go’

In the 21 to 23 pairs of sentences the suffixed morpheme with verb is –*a:ŋi*. It is the morpheme peculiar to this dialect that has the sole semantic function to express politeness. It is used to tone down the imperative mood while a younger converse with an elder. As found

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in other morphemes for politeness, the use of -a:ŋi is also depended on SD, P, and R variables.

-a:ŋi might be the contracted form of imperative marker ka:ŋin~ka:ŋmin~kanvi:n. It could have been formed in the way when /k/ and /n/ are dropped from the initial and final positions respectively.

vaikkə, kajjə, pattə

The question form framed with the suffixed verbs *vaikkə*, *kajjə*, *pattə* are used in this dialect for extremely polite request.

24. A: *atə onnə koŋto:ra:n vaikkə*? (highly polite)

That one INT to bring able to POL

Could you please bring that?

B: *atə onnə koŋto:ruo*? (polite)

That one bring POL (can you)

Can you bring that?

25. A: *atə onnə koŋto:ra:n kajjuo*? (highly polite)

That one to bring able to POL (you)

Could you please bring that?

B: *atə onnə koŋto:ruo*? (polite)

That one bring POL (can you)

Can you bring that?

26. A: *atə onnə koŋto:ra:n pattuo*? (highly polite)

That one to bring able to POL (you)

Could you please bring that?

B: *atə onnə koŋto:ruo*? (polite)

That one bring POL (can you)

Can you bring that?

In the 24 to 26 pairs of sentences the word set *vaikkə*, *kajjə*, *pattə*, that denote ‘able to’ are added with verb + a:n forms and it makes such utterances more polite. When those lexemes become the part of this particular syntactic structure attain additional semantic value of politeness.

Conclusion

The study identified that Eranad Dialect of Malayalam has peculiar linguistic behaviour to express polite imperatives. The unique lexical strategies, bound morphemes, suffixed verbs, and post positions used for politeness can be considered as a major identity marker of this dialect. In addition to honorific marker this dialect makes use of near synonymous lexical set for politeness and impoliteness. Though the imperatives are levelled as neutral polite form (-u:) in standard Malayalam, the Eranad dialect of Malayalam still

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maintain + & - polite forms at lexical and morphological levels. Though the morphemic structure of the polite expressions at surface level are felt to be distinct and completely alien to other dialect of Malayalam, while exploring the deep structure they can be identified as metamorphic expressions of old Malayalam forms or less frequent morphemes in the present Malayalam. Another feature identified in this study is the semantic value of 'small quantity quantifiers' in increasing the degree of politeness. This feature probably be prevailed in other dialect as well. The study also presents this feature for a further in-depth cross dialectal enquiry.

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