

# **LANGUAGE IN INDIA**

**Strength for Today and Bright Hope for Tomorrow**

**Volume 8 : 7 July 2008**

**ISSN 1930-2940**

**Managing Editor: M. S. Thirumalai, Ph.D.**

**Editors: B. Mallikarjun, Ph.D.**

**Sam Mohanlal, Ph.D.**

**B. A. Sharada, Ph.D.**

**A. R. Fatihi, Ph.D.**

**Lakhan Gusain, Ph.D.**

**K. Karunakaran, Ph.D.**

**Jennifer Marie Bayer, Ph.D.**

**The Uses of Second Person Pronoun in Tamil and  
Telugu**

**A. Parimala Gantham, Ph.D. Candidate**

# The Use of Second Person Pronoun in Tamil and Telugu

A. Parimala Gantham, Ph.D. Candidate

---

## Introduction

When we address a person we must choose our words carefully to show the social relation between us. Each linguistic community has its own sets of verbal behaviour specified for each context and situation. A speaker is not free to choose any of the alternatives available in the language. He or she is constrained to use what is most appropriate for the context.

While talking with others we have to use different styles. That is, what we want to say, how we want to say and how to select appropriate sentences, types, words and sounds, etc., are all governed by certain rules. Content and form is inseparable.

Choice of pronouns and related syntactic and morphological nuances are set apart in many languages, more so in tradition-bound societies of India. Terms used to name and address are used also to express politeness, etc.

## Pronouns as Substitutes

Pronouns certainly function as substitutes of nouns. But they also perform various other important functions in linguistic communication. They are used for the sake of brevity and to avoid unnecessary and clumsy repetitions of nouns. Pronouns are said to have syntactic functions in sentences, where they are recognized as one of the word classes. Pronoun stands instead of the name of a person or thing. Friedrich (1964) sums up neatly the pronominal usage: "Just two short words operating in all speech events that involve two interlocutors signaled of dyadic relationship".

## Pronouns as a Grammatical Item

Pronoun, as a grammatical item, plays an important role in maintaining and identifying the relationship that holds between individuals in the society. Thus, pronouns have a great social relevance. Pronominal usage indicates differences or dominance, intimacy or distance, equality or differential in status of the addresser and the addressee. We are bound to select or use the right pronoun after knowing who the addressee is, his or her position or status in the society, age, education, etc. An inappropriate selection may create unpleasantness between dyads and sometimes may lead to undesirable consequences.

Grammatical error may not cause much effort but the violation of a cultural norm will result the serious misunderstanding or ill-feeling.

*Language in India* [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com) 8 : 7 2008

A. Parimala Gantham The Use of Second Person Pronoun in Tamil and Telugu

## **Pronouns as Social Indicators**

That pronouns are social indicators is clearly seen in the use of pronouns in Indian languages. Every second language teaching material, including those written by early Christian missionaries, such as those by A.C. Clayton, et al., have taken note of this complexity for the benefit of the second language learners of Indian languages. A participant observation method mother tongue perspective on the subject is dealt with by Thirumalai (1983: *Aspects of Language Use*, All India Tamil Linguistics Association, Annamalainagar).

## **The Goal of This Paper**

The present paper aims to describe the pronouns, especially the second person pronouns, used by the Tamil and the Telugu speakers with different dyads in different situations in the society. I also try to identify any form used other than the second person pronoun in such situations.

The data for the present study is collected using a questionnaire. In addition, I also collected data from some weekly magazines. I observed various people engaged in conversation and this also resulted in abundant data for my research.

## **The Questionnaire**

The questionnaire contained two parts: The first part contained the Personal data such as the name, gender, age, status, education, place of current residence, original native place, etc. The second part contained questions about the use of pronouns in different domains like family, friends, neighbours, markets, educational institutions, work places, etc. The informants were my office co-workers and their friends.

To describe the use of the second person in Tamil and Telugu, the domain analysis method was followed. The domains, which were considered in this article, are the family, friends, neighbours, servants, market places, the vegetable vendors, educational institutions, work places, and the styles of speech adopted by politician and swamijis. The above situations were divided into four as normal, angry, tension and the other moods.

## **Non-reciprocal Address**

### **Family Domain: Parents and Elders**

As far as the family domain is concerned, the relationship is non-reciprocal among the elders and the younger people in both the languages. That is, the elder addresses the younger *nii/nuvvu* and receives the forms *niingal/miiru* from them. Among the equals and the youngsters, the relationship is reciprocal or symmetrical. That is, addressing *nii/nuvvu* and receiving *nii/nuvvu* is common. This system may be disturbed due to gender variation, the mood of anger, tension, etc.

*Language in India* [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com) 8 : 7 2008

**A. Parimala Gantham The Use of Second Person Pronoun in Tamil and Telugu**

In both the languages, some of my informants reported that they used niingaL/miiru to the elders and received nii/nuvvu from them. Some other informants informed that with their father, grand father, and uncle they use niingaL/miiru and with their mothers, grandmothers, and aunts they use nii/nuvvu and receive nii/nuvvu from them. But I also found out through my observation that the closeness in relationship or close personal familiarity between the addresser and the addressee makes the situation symmetrical. That is, people may use under the above circumstances and relationships nii/nuvvu and receiving nii/nuvvu irrespective of male, female or younger and elder variables. This is attested also in materials published in weekly magazines and in TV, movies, etc. In Telugu sometimes discussing with their father, children may use miiru in the beginning and end up using nuvvu (especially by the daughters).

Telugu: Caalaa roojulu taruvaattha ruum niiTTugaa sardeeru (or)  
Ee coorsu ceeramanTaavu naannaa?

“After a longtime the room is appeared as neat (or) which course I have to join Daddy?”

If the elders get angry or some tension develops in their relationship with the addressee, they may call the younger person with high respect. At that time the pronoun tammaru in Telugu and the respective pronoun niingaL in Tamil are used.

Telugu: tamari salahe prahaaram naTuccukuntaanu ( or)  
tamaru diiniikki eem samaadaanam ceptaaru  
“I’ll follow your advice (or) what is the answer you give for this?”

Tamil: Niinga onnum engaLukku ceyyaveeNDaam  
“Your service is not necessary”

In Tamil some parents used the respect-denoting form with their children such as niingaL/tambi/paappaa/ name/nick name/ kuTTi etc., instead of nii with affection.

Tamil: niingaL caappiTuviingalaam amma katee colluveenaam (or)  
niingaL caappiTuviingalaam amma uuTTiviTuveenaam  
“You should eat Mother should tell the story (or) you should eat Mother should feed you”

As far as Telugu is concerned, this type of construction is not found. Among the equal age groups and with the youngsters, that is, between sisters and brothers, the form niingaL/miiru is used in the angry and the tension mood.

### **Family Domain: Husband and Wife**

As far as the husband and wife relation is concerned, non-reciprocal or the asymmetrical that is addressing nii/nuvvu by the husband and receiving niingaL/miiru from the wife is common. Some times nuvvu is also used when they are in isolation. If the wife gets angry

or lose her respect for her husband or when the husband does some unwanted things the wife may address him as nii/nuvvu.

Telugu: Nuvvu inTikkhi raakkuNTaa isuka daggire unTunnaavu

“You are staying near the sand by not coming to the house” (When the husband and the wife are talking face to face the wife addresses her husband as miiru).

Aa phooTToni akkaDanincchi tiisaavoo cey narukeestaa

Idivaraloo nuvvu naaloo bhaaryaane cuusaavu

Kaani ippuDhu chennakkesava redid cellelni nuvvu cuustaavu

“Don’t remove that photo from there, if you remove it I’ll cut your hand; until now you saw me as your wife, but now you will see me as the sister of Chenna keshava Reddy (While doing unwanted things the wife will say nuvvu).

nuvvu mukkukuNTe mukkuko adinaaku sambandam leeni visayam

“If you worship God you worship, it is not related to me” (When the wife showing no respect towards her husband)

In the disgusted mood, the wife may start with the respectful pronoun miiru and mix it with nuvvu then and there, and she may end up with miirru.

Telugu: Sahitya elaa unnaav? – Husband

“How are you Sahitya?

Bhaganeenu. Miirelaa unnaaru – Wife

“I am fine. How are you?

Mana inTikki vellaam – Husband

“Come we’ll go to our house.

manillaa? Nii antaTTa nuvvugaa tappu telusukeni unTee aanandincee daani nuvvu ceesina gaayaanni maravaDaaniki alavaaTTu paDutunnaanu adi gurtu ceeyakanDi ingaa miiru vellanDi – Wife.

“Our house? If you would have realized your mistake by yourself. I would have felt happy. Now I try to forget the wound which you gave. Don’t remind me that. You go back (to your house).

But as far as Tamil is concerned, I’m not able to give examples as clear as in Telugu.

In Telugu, the utterances given above may be attested clearly in interactions between younger folks. Among the older generations such interactions are not readily attested in my data. The form tamaru, the high respect form, is used both by the husband and the wife if they want to tease each other in Telugu.

*Language in India* [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com) 8 : 7 2008

**A. Parimala Gantham The Use of Second Person Pronoun in Tamil and Telugu**

tvaragaa ready avvu – husband  
“Get ready soon”

intaakaTinunchi leeni tondara tamariki ippuDu eemiTToo – wife  
“The hurry ness which you don’t have before why now?”

In Tamil the teasing form may be amma.

For example, in Tamil, amma vanduTTingaloo peesa; pooDi uLLee.  
“Oh, the great lady you has come to argue. Go inside (the house)”

### **Master-Servant Relationship**

Considering the Master and Servant relationship, it is non-reciprocal. That is, the master will say nii/nuvvu to the servant and the master receives niingaL/miiru from him. In Telugu irrespective of age and gender, the servant is called by the master as nuvvu.

The interview method, the observation method and the data from mass media all support the above statement. In return, the servant calls the master as miiru. The servant may call the master as nuvvu/miiru, if the master is younger or the servant is working for a long period in that particular house or the servant may consider himself or herself as one of the family members.

Even though the master is younger to the servant and if the master’s status, that is, the economic status, social status and the educational status, is higher than that of the servant, either the respect form miiru or the high respect pronoun tamaru.

But, in Tamil, the above particular situation is somewhat different from that of Telugu. If the servant is the elder person, whether he is a male or female, the younger people will use the term niingaL with the addition of the term annaa/akka/amma and receive nii/niingaL from them. In the educational situation, the watchman and the other servants are called by the children as uncle/akka with the respect form niingaL and receive nii form them.

### **Neighbourhood and Neighbours**

As far as the neighbours who are known to the speaker, the elders will address the younger as nii/nuvvu and receive the term niingaL/miiru from them. If they are of the same age group, then the relationship between them is reciprocal. That is, telling nii/nuvvu and receiving the same. Suppose if they are new, in the beginning the relation may be reciprocal in using the respect from niingaL/miiru and receiving the from niingaL/miiru. After some time it may change into either non-reciprocal or reciprocal depending upon the closeness of relationship/development of familiarity.

### **Sales Transaction in the Neighbourhood**

*Language in India* [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com) 8 : 7 2008

**A. Parimala Gantham The Use of Second Person Pronoun in Tamil and Telugu**

If we observe the vendors who sell things such as vegetables, fruits, etc., in the street, we notice that their relation with the people in the houses are either reciprocal or non-reciprocal depending upon the neighbourhood in which the sale is effected. If the neighbourhood is perceived to be of a higher social and economic status, then the term used may be non-reciprocal. That is, the buyers address the vendors as *nii/nuvvu* and receive *niingaL/miiru* in return due to their economic and or social status. But the neighbourhoods, where low-income people live, the address term is reciprocal, that is, persons address individuals as *nii/nuvvu* and receive *nii/nuvvu*.

### **Market Places**

As far as the places like markets and shops are concerned, the pronouns used are *nii/nuvvu* and *niingaL/miiru* depending upon the places where the markets and the shops are situated. It also depends upon the attire and the dialect of the customers. The markets and the shops located in a neighbourhood perceived to be of a higher social and economic status, the seller and the buyer relation is normally reciprocal which is in the respect mode. That is, sellers and buyers address one another *niingaL/miiru*.

If the shops and the markets are in the middle class and mixed social groups neighbourhood then the relation may be either reciprocal or non-reciprocal, depending upon the perceived status of the buyer. That is, the buyer may use *niingaL/miiru* and receive the same or use *nii/nuvvu* and receive the same. The seller may address the buyer *niingaL/miiru*. In turn the buyer may call the seller as *nii/nuvvu*. This is possible if the buyer looks well dressed or an elder person than the seller. In the slum area the relations between the buyer and seller is usually reciprocal. That is, both the buyer and the seller use *nii/nuvvu* and receive *nii/nuvvu* from one another. The reason may be that both the buyer and the seller may be of the same status.

### **Among the Friends**

Among the friends, if they are in equal age group, or if they maintain a very close relationship between them, then the relation is reciprocal. They use *nii/nuvvu* to address one another and receive *nii/nuvvu*.

In Tamil one peculiar form of construction is available among female friends. When the friends of equal age group chat with each other, they use the personal names to address one another, instead of *nii*. For example, instead of *nii eppa vantee?* they use *Parimala, eppa vantee?* “Parimala, when did you come?” The reason for this, perhaps, is the hesitation to address one another as *nii*. The same is applicable between the elders and the younger persons if they are very close to each other. The elder person hesitates to address the younger as *nii* and at the same time it does not sound appropriate to use *niingaL* to address the younger person at the same time. So, the speaker may address the person by using the name as in the example *Parimala, eppa vantee?* “Parimala, when did you come?”

## **Sense of Social Insecurity**

There appears to be some sort of social insecurity in operation here. Since the social status is changing along with the change in economic and educational status, individuals feel insecure in the choice of address terms. Safety lies in resorting to the use of personal names, instead of using pronominal terms. However, note that the pronominal plus tense plus gender markers attached to the main verb still continue to reveal the social status. The situation is evolving, and perhaps in a few generations, things may settle down to a norm based on the socio-economic rules.

Among the equals this pattern is seen mostly with the female group. Other friends like the sister's friend, brother's friend, and other family members' friends may adopt either reciprocal or non-reciprocal address terms depending on their age.

## **Among the Strangers**

If one meets any unknown person on the road, or if any unknown person comes to the house, the addressing relation normally is reciprocal. That is, the parties involved use *niingaL/miiru* to address and receive *niingaL/miiru*. With this type of unknown person relationship in Telugu, there is also a possibility of using the high respect pronoun, replying to the initial speaker when the initial speaker is seen to give an unsolicited advice:.

Telugu: In the bus anta ibbandigaa feel ayitee autoloo vellaali.

“In the bus situation, if you feel that much trouble, you may prefer to take an Auto.”

A reply may be given as follows:

tamaru salahe iccaaru gaadaa? Atlaagee ceestaaanuleeyaNDi.

“You have told O.K. we'll do the same immediately”

But, in Tamil, this type of situation is not normally attested. But the Tamils may use the terms *amma/ayya/periyavaree/Dorai/mahaaraani/etc* to address the initial speaker who is seen to give an unsolicited advice, in a voice that reveals tension. For example *amma/ayya colliTTiingalee cenjuruvom* “You have told us. O.K., we'll do that immediately.”

## **Politicians and Swamijis**

Politicians and gurus and guru-like persons (persons of status in the domain of religion) such as *baabaas*, saints, *swamijis*, the relationship among them is always reciprocal. The followers use *niingaL/miiru* and receive *nii/nuvvu*. The followers use the high respect pronoun, frequently. As far as Tamil is concerned, people usually address the political leaders as *amma/ayya/talaiva/annee*. Everybody from her political party (AIADMK) addresses the former Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, Jayalalitha, as *amma*. Even while

*Language in India* [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com) 8 : 7 2008

**A. Parimala Gantham The Use of Second Person Pronoun in Tamil and Telugu**



speaking to her face to face, none will tell her, niingaL conninga “you told (us)”. Instead they use to tell amma ceyya conninga/amma varacconninga, etc., meaning “Amma (Jayalalitha) has asked us to do.” This is not really a special provision or new development. This manner of address is applied in many situations, in offices and in politics, long before Jayalalitha became prominent in politics. (See Thirumalai 1983, *Aspects of Language Use*.)

### **The Downfall of Small Fries in Politics, etc., and Pronoun Usage**

Small fries in the political hierarchy, who received such high respect address while in power, lose their status if by chance they loose their power or their spiritual power or any bad news about them is known to people. To cite an example, in Telugu one police officer respected one particular swamiji as his god as long as he did not know about the past history of that swamiji. When the police officer came to know that the swamiji was a jailbird once, immediately his respect decreased and he used the pronoun nuvvu in the example “nuvvu forest guardgaa paniceesina subramaniyaanivi kaadu, disgust nuvvu forest guardgaa unDagaa ninnu arrest ceesindi neenee. This situation is applicable both in Tamil and Telugu.

### **Address to the Celestial Beings**

As far as the celestial bodies like gods and others are concerned the pronoun nii/nuvvu is used. But the writers who write the conversations humans have with high gods and other celestial members show that the gods normally use the address terms nii/nuvvu and receive the high respect form taangaL/tamaru. Both in Tamil and Telugu, when celestial members engage themselves in conversation among them they use reciprocal address terms.

Telugu: The conversation between the Hindu god Indira and Naradha:

Indra: Nii sangalpameedoo selavivvavaa naaradhaa?  
“What is your opinion Naradha?”

Naradha: Niikku teliyadhaa? Nuvvu graginchaleevaa devendra ?  
“Devandra don’t you know? Can’t you understand it?”

### **Conclusion**

1. The pronoun nii, niingaL and taangaL in Tamil and nuvvu, and miiru, tamaru in Telugu are used depending upon the social variables such as age, sex, education, economic status, social statue, place of residence, etc.
2. The person’s mood at the time of interaction also plays an important role in the use of second person pronoun.

3. In Tamil, among the female friends of equal age or elder versus younger, while taking face to face, participants in a conversation, use personal names instead of using the pronoun *nii*. This type is not available in Telugu.
  4. In Telugu, whether the servant maid is younger or elder to the master, the master addresses the servant maid as *nuvvu*. But this type is not found in Tamil.
  5. In Tamil, some parents address their children as *niingaL/kuTTi/paappaa/tambi* instead of *nii* with affection. This situation is not found in Telugu.
  6. In Telugu, in the same conversation (Father-Daughter conversation & the Husband-Wife conversation) one time the daughter may addresses her father as *miiru* and in another time she may addresses as *nuvvu*, within the same conversation. But in Tamil this is not normally attested.
- 

**Parimala Gantham, Ph.D. Candidate**  
**Department of Lexicography**  
**Telugu University**  
**Hyderabad – 500 004**  
**Andhra Pradesh, India**  
[parimala11@yahoo.co.in](mailto:parimala11@yahoo.co.in)