

The Conflict of Grammaticality and Meaningfulness of the Corrupt Words: A Cross-lingual Sociolinguistic Study

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Abstract : The grammatical tradition in Sanskrit literature emphasizes the importance of the correct use of Sanskrit words or linguistic units (sādhū śabda) that brings the meritorious values, denying the attribution of the same religious merit to the incorrect use of Sanskrit words (asādhū śabda) or the vernacular or corrupt forms (apa-śabda or apabhraṃśa), even though they may help in communication. The current research, the culmination of the doctoral research on sentence definition, studies the difference among the comprehension of both correct and incorrect word forms in Sanskrit and Marathi languages in India. Based on the total of 19 experiments (both web-based and classroom-controlled) on approximately 900 Indian readers, it is found that while the incorrect forms in Sanskrit are comprehended with lesser accuracy than the correct word forms, no such difference can be seen for the Marathi language. It is interpreted that the incorrect word forms in the native language or in the language which is spoken daily (such as Marathi) will pose a lesser cognitive load as compared to the language that is not spoken on a daily basis but only used for reading (such as Sanskrit). The theoretical base for the research problem is as follows: among the three main schools of Language Science in ancient India, the Vaiyākaraṇas (Grammarians) hold that the corrupt word forms do have their own expressive power since they convey meaning, while as the Mimāṃsakas (the Exegesists) and the Naiyāyikas (the Logicians) believe that the corrupt forms can only convey the meaning indirectly, by recalling their association and similarity with the correct forms. The grammarians argue that the vernaculars that are born of the speaker's inability to speak proper Sanskrit are regarded as degenerate versions or fallen forms of the 'divine' Sanskrit language and speakers who could not use proper Sanskrit or the standard language were considered as Śiṣṭa ('elite'). The different ideas of different schools strictly adhere to their textual dispositions. For the last few years, sociolinguists have agreed that no variety of language is inherently better than any other; they are all the same as long as they serve the need of people that use them. Although the standard form of a language may offer the speakers some advantages, the non-standard variety is considered the most natural style of speaking. This is visible in the results. If the incorrect word forms incur the recall of the correct word forms in the reader as the theory suggests, it would have added one extra step in the process of sentential cognition leading to more cognitive load and less accuracy. This has not been the case for the Marathi language. Although speaking and listening to the vernaculars is the common practice and reading the vernacular is not, Marathi readers have readily and accurately comprehended the incorrect word forms in the sentences, as against the Sanskrit readers. The primary reason being Sanskrit is spoken and also read in the standard form only and the vernacular forms in Sanskrit are not found in the conversational data.

Keywords : experimental sociolinguistics, grammaticality and meaningfulness, Marathi, Sanskrit

Conference Title : ICSPL 2023 : International Conference on Sociolinguistics and Philosophy of Language

Conference Location : London, United Kingdom

Conference Dates : June 22-23, 2023