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# Speaking Like a Brahmin: Social Aspects of a Register of Spoken Telugu

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Speaking Like a Brahmin: Social Aspects of a  
Register of Spoken Telugu

Brad B. Miller

A thesis submitted to the faculty of  
Brigham Young University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of

Master of Arts

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## ABSTRACT

### Speaking Like a Brahmin: Social Aspects of a Register of Spoken Telugu

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Master of Arts

Among sociological studies in South Asia, frequent reference is made to caste as one of the greatest motivating factors in establishing, reinforcing, and creating social structure. This system of social hierarchy has, however, undergone drastic shifts and changes over the past decades (Dirks, 2001: 5) resulting in 'caste' as a term used to systematize concepts of social identity, community, and organization in India. The Brahmin caste, in particular, has undergone drastic changes as a result of social and political influence from without as well as from within, resulting in a conflict of identity (Bairy, 2010: 233).

As a direct result of this conflict of caste identity, many individuals respond, act, and interact in ways that confirm, reject, or (re)establish their own individual identity within the greater scheme of their caste. The current study will examine specific ways in which Telugu Brahmins use linguistic markers to index socially acceptable, cultural ideologies. It will be explained how the use of lexical borrowings, markers of politeness and honorification, and emphatic aspiration index historical ideologies of Brahmin-ness. In indexing these ideologies, Brahmins identify with and associate their own actions in relation to traditional notions of those qualities assumed to be inherent in the Brahmin caste. Furthermore, meta-linguistic discourse will be examined, showing that recognition, acknowledgment of, and (mis)interpretation of a 'Brahmin register' is used to both mark intra-caste solidarity and reinforce social stereotypes about the caste.

Keywords: register, caste, social hierarchy, Brahmin, Telugu

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I dedicate this thesis to *mi princesa ecuatoriana*.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

### 1.1. Introduction

Among sociological studies of India, caste is perhaps one of the leading topics of discussion. For hundreds of years, the concept of caste has fascinated the western world, as can be seen in the multitude of books and articles written on the subject. Because of its highlighted role among sociological research, it has also taken an almost elevated role within sociolinguistics as the exemplary model for social stratification and subsequent linguistic variation. Gumperz (1958: 668; 1961: 976; 1964: 137) was perhaps one of the first to use linguistic variables to show the interface of caste and language, specifically as they deal with social interaction.

Unfortunately, beyond Gumperz, scientifically sound research on this interface has been rather limited to either passing reference to Gumperz and caste-based variation or individual case studies by a small handful of others (Miranda, 1976: 77; Rao & Ruback, 1986: 177; Sastry, 1994: 11; Suseendirajah, 1978: 312; etc.).

This discrepancy of research would not be so much of an issue if Indian society had remained the same over the past years; however societal stagnation has never happened. In addition, as many an Indologist will attest, societal norms in one region of India do not necessarily hold true in another. Moreover, matters of political and social reform have taken hold throughout the country over the decades preceding and following independence from the British Crown continuing up to this date, and as a direct result any discussions of caste that held true even 20 years ago are now finding themselves quite outdated (Bairy, 2003: 23). As such, it is apparent that further studies of linguistic interaction are needed to help shed light on questions that arise out of caste-based societal issues.

The following research offers new insight into the role language plays in establishing and (re)forming caste identity, particularly in relation to the highest caste in the traditional structure, the Brahmins. Social reform over the decades has created a situation in which Brahmin identity is torn between political, social, and religious fronts. As such, this research will examine certain linguistic methods that identify, confirm, or conflict with traditional Brahmin ideologies. I propose that three linguistic items - lexical borrowings, honorific forms, and aspiration - are indicative of caste ideologies and as such shed light on the already complex societal issue of caste status.

This introductory chapter will offer background information on the caste system, its history, and the reason why Brahmins in particular feel a need to re-establish their own caste status through language use. I will also offer definitions for certain terminology to be used throughout the paper as well as a detailed explanation of the methodology used in gathering and analyzing my data. I will conclude by offering an outline of the remainder of this paper.

## **1.2. On Caste, History, and the Brahmin Tradition**

### **1.2.1. The evolution of caste**

Among those Vedic texts most frequently cited, there exist several that outline the premise of caste in Hinduism. In the *Rg Veda*, dating to ca. 2200-1600 BC, one passage is often used as the foundational scripture for the popularized concept of caste hierarchy.

When they divided the Cosmic Man, into how many parts did they apportion him? What do they call his mouth, his two arms and thighs and feet? His mouth became the

Brahmin; his arms were made into the Kshatriya; his thighs the Vaishya; and from his feet the Shudra were born.

*Rg Veda Samhitaa* 10.90.11-12 (translated in Smith, 1994: 27-28)

The story of the genesis of man highlights through metaphor those unique qualities assumed to be inherent in different types of men. The Brahmin, created first, is said to possess qualities of the mouth and, through synecdoche, the head (including thought, reasoning, skill with language and science, etc.). The Kshatriya, second in order of creation, is said to find skill in the arm from which he emanates. Those arms, meant to signify aspects of rule and dominion, intend for the Kshatriya to act as a soldier in times of war and as a politician or king in times of peace. The Vaishya, emanating from the thighs, is to support and hold the body of society through his skill and prowess as a merchant and landowner. Finally, the Shudra is meant to serve them all, just as the feet are the lowliest part of the body (ibid. 29).

The Sanskrit term, *varṇa*, associated with this societal division of labor and qualities, is frequently translated as ‘category’ or ‘class’, though it may also be explained as ‘color’ in the sense of an intrinsic characteristic or attribute (Sharma, 1975: 294). Regardless of the specific translation, the concept behind *varṇa* is that of classification. This classification, however, is not restricted simply to humans, but rather is meant to explain the entirety of nature and the cosmos. *Varṇa*, in one seemingly simple and basic structure, is able to classify such ostensibly diverse realms as the spheres of flora and fauna, divisions between space and time, variations in revelation and scripture, and even the unseen dominion of the gods. Those Brahmin creators of the concept of *varṇa* were able to convince the populous of its reality by interweaving it throughout nature and the entire cosmogonical story. Thus, as Smith says, if all things “bear

witness to classification according to *varṇa*, how could an organization of society along these lines be regarded as anything other than the way things should be?” (1994: 58-59).

Though *varṇa* was taught and explained as a simple description of the organization of nature, its first and primary status was that of dividing society into unique parts. Similar in nature to the ‘tripartite ideology’ expressed by Dumézil (1958: 64), certain groups within Hindu society held the power of unique arenas. These functions – religion and rule, defense, and productivity – afford unique duties and responsibilities (*dharma*) to individuals, with spiritual success determined by specific fulfillment of such duties. While it has been argued that castes were not closed, separate groups as was previously claimed, but rather that *varṇa* in the preclassical period was highly politicized, with certain castes (Brahmins and Kshatriyas especially) participating in a ‘reversal of roles’ of sorts (Heesterman, 1985: 29-30), for the most part, it is found that those political frontiers determined by caste duty were crucial in determining social space (Srinivas, 1962: 15). It is this caste duty that influences many social groupings according to caste throughout India even to this day.

Beyond the political realm, *varṇa* was also a strong prescriber of inherent traits. By the simple result of being born a Brahmin, for example, a man was automatically assumed to hold a higher intelligence, be more adept at pronouncing complex Sanskrit words, and be more mentally capable of memorizing the vast tomes of scripture. A Kshatriya, in contrast, was assumed to be larger and more physically capable of the stresses that come with a soldier’s life, and a Vaishya presumably had a mind for business (Carstairs, 1961: 124).

Pre-colonial explorers, who first came to South Asia, saw Indian social structure in a way that was quite similar to systems of feudalism that had developed in medieval Europe. In fact,

most descriptions of Indian society wrote rather marginally about caste as a system, and only then in relation to the religious concept of *dharmā*, as would have been explained to them by Brahmin informants (Dirks, 2001: 19-21). It wasn't until the 16th century that the first use of the term 'caste' emerged in the writings of Portuguese explorer Duarte Barbosa. In his report on the social structure of the kingdom of Vijayanagara, Barbosa referred to *casta* as a social order of the lowest classes, in contradistinction to their overlords, stating "there are three classes of heathen, each one of which has a very distinct rule of its own, and also their customs differ much one from the other" (Dames, 1918: 212).

Over two centuries later, as the East India Company established itself in South Asia in 1757, the concept of caste began to take a more prominent position in discussions of culture. As the Company's hand of power began to extend over vast regions of the subcontinent, many officers/scientists expressed personal interest in working to better understand the underpinnings of Hindu society. Dirks (2001: 244-246) writes that the British saw a land full of traditions that went contrary to Christianity; slavery, human sacrifice, female infanticide, and other issues were viewed as subsidiary to, yet resulting from, the corrupt influence of caste. As such, the error-causing organization of caste needed to be better understood if it was to be repaired. Volumes of literature were written describing the numerous occupation-based subcastes, their supposed inherent qualities, the physical and cultural differences of various groups, and caste's organizational hierarchy. All was done in an attempt to afford structure to this seemingly haphazard form of social hierarchy.

Over time, especially following the Great Rebellion of 1857, the preoccupation with historical and sociological inquiry for economic profit switched to a focus on anthropological

and ethnographic inquiry (ibid. 43-44). In doing so, the British Crown hoped to better understand its new subjects' social order so as to be better equipped at maintaining control. In this, they found that attempts to show physical similarities within castes were impossible, which had they function would have made the issue of the organization of castes much easier to understand and control.

In an attempt to prescribe certain status to the various castes, allotting them position within a hierarchy, officers such as H. H. Risley, the census commissioner and superintendent of the Ethnographic Survey, began to redefine the British concept of caste categories across South Asia. This would allow for an enumeration of the entire population using their caste (ibid. 51). However, in doing so it soon became even more apparent that caste was not easily made into a stable, consistent organization as it previously had been hoped. Subcaste groups would rank themselves on a higher scale in one region than similar groups would in another, thus complicating the seeming systematicity of the organization. Physical traits of a caste in one region would be entirely different for the same caste in another region. As a result it became prudent for these officers and scientists to re-conceptualize caste in its entirety, simply claiming that caste was a mere identification marker, that certain castes held status over others depending upon the region, and that occupation was most frequently determined by caste. In redefining caste to their own satisfaction, however, the British expected their Hindu subjects to conform to these new constructions, taking caste and its influence on society to become something far from its original organization (Cohn, 1996: 44).

This new caste system was one where the caste of religion and caste politics were separated. This is not to say that caste was no longer a facet of Hinduism, but rather that caste-

based religious duty was separate from the politics of caste. The strong influences of ‘westernization’ (Srinivas, 1962: 62) came to influence all people, pushing caste dogma into the realm of religion and away from politics. Again, Dirks (2001: 12) concludes that as a result, politics came to rely upon the social distinctions of caste, with colonial officers affording privilege to certain groups while restricting the power of others due to a perceived benefit as a result of caste status. Political concepts of democracy, equality, and justice came to dominate the discussions of caste organizations while religious reform became a more private affair. The British, perhaps unknowingly, set in motion sociological and political movements that would cause endless influence throughout the issue of caste and society.

### 1.2.2. The ancient Brahmin tradition

One commonly mentioned trait of caste as a system is the seemingly unequal distribution of rights, benefits, traits, and abilities attributed to the different castes (Smith, 1994: 32). The concept of equal justice raises an issue of innate versus acquired traits. It is accepted that all human beings are born with certain inherent, genetic qualities: hair and skin color, height, gender, etc. At the same time science has shown how other traits (e.g. - intelligence, linguistic ability, etc.) are acquired through environmental influence and societal interaction. Caste as it was originally understood, interestingly, describes many traits as being inherent rather than the product of environmental influence. Brahmins were expected to have certain physical and mental features that were unique to their caste. As such a non-Brahmin was not allowed to claim Brahmin status, work in an occupation reserved for a Brahmin, or even speak as a Brahmin, as such actions would be against the nature of caste traits. As the metamorphosis of caste began to



take place, however, western influence came to separate those rights inherent in caste. Societal change came to necessitate a different view of the distribution of individual qualities (Dumont, 1980: 347).

The Brahmin has always held the highest rank within the hierarchy of caste. This superiority, as apparent in the cosmogonic story, is stated as an inherent attribute of the caste as a whole. As the first-born, the Brahmin is expected to be viewed as the cornerstone upon which the entirety of Hinduism is to be built (Zaehner, 1966: 8). Vedic (scriptural) texts refer to a force, generalized and omnipresent, as that essential and intrinsic quality belonging to Brahmins. This *brahman* power is the very essence of the Vedas themselves, as the term itself may also be interpreted as ‘Veda’ or ‘truth’ (Smith, 1994: 32).

This *brahman* power is the most excellent (*jyeṣṭha*); there is nothing more excellent than this. He who knows this, being himself the most excellent, becomes the highest (*śreṣṭha*) among his own people. The *brahman* has nothing before it and nothing after it. And for the one who knows this *brahman* to have nothing before it and nothing after it there is no one higher among his compatriots. And his descendants will be higher still.

*Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (*Mādhyandina* recension) 10.3.5.10-11

The *brahman* generated the gods; the *brahman* generated this whole world... [and therefore] the *brahman* is the best of all beings.

*Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa* 2.8.8.9-10 (translated in Smith, 1994: 32)

Brahmins are the only caste to which the rights of the Hindu priesthood belong and as such all knowledge of and dominion over the spiritual realm is afforded to them. That same knowledge is most importantly synonymous with the “supposedly sacrosanct and

transcendentally originated knowledge... called ‘the Veda’” (ibid. 32). Vedic scriptures, with the *mantras*, or sacred words to be recited for ceremonial purposes, explanation for the use of such *mantras* (*brāhmaṇa*) and the practical rules of procedure (*sūtras*), are exceedingly vast. Yet in spite of a size of over 1,000 pages for some tomes, the Vedas are to be memorized, recited, and maintained entirely through oral tradition (Ingalls, 1959: 3-4). It is for this reason that devotion to education, linguistic prowess, and intellect are qualities assumed to be inherent in the Brahmin caste.

Carstairs (1961: 115-120) writes that, as per tradition, from the young age of 8, young Brahmin males are to begin their education in the Vedas. Induction into a life of service begins with the thread marriage ceremony, where a sacred thread is draped over the left shoulder, symbolizing his second birth. While use of the sacred thread is not specific to Brahmins, as it is a privilege afforded to all ‘twice-born’ castes (Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya), it is most frequently associated with the Brahmin. After receiving this gift of the priesthood, a Brahmin boy may begin his education with a *guru*, where for hours every day, for days upon end, a student (*śishya*) would repeat after his teacher while seated at his feet. Repetition and memorization are meant to be complete and precise, with no room for error. Some would devote their education entirely to the memorization of one Veda, taking nearly 8 years in the process with the end result being a complete understanding of the scripture and all doctrine therein. Others would follow a different path of learning, devoting life studies to the understanding of Sanskrit grammar, rhetoric, poetry, or logic. While this type of education could be just as difficult and time-intensive, it included a much heavier focus on analysis rather than rote recitation. Other Brahmins would follow more

esoteric traditions, learning and teaching such concepts as the nature of reality, religious dogma and symbolism, and other such philosophical topics.

While the occupations for a Brahmin were quite expansive, the fact remains that the Brahmin tradition emphasized and continues to emphasize education for education's sake, stressing that proper education is done for the personal benefit of gaining wisdom and knowledge (Bairy, 2010: 184). With this in mind, it is understood why other castes, for which education was never a highly emphasized part of their dharma, were viewed as intellectually inferior to the Brahmins. The belief that Brahmins are to be more privileged in the arena of education still holds today, as was seen in various personal interviews<sup>1</sup>.

One important aspect of Brahmin *dharma* and tradition is that of personal purity. A true Brahmin, one who is more than a Brahmin by name but who exemplifies the Brahmin tradition, should be pure and clean of body and action. Physical contact with any impure entities or substances would require immediate ritualistic cleansing. As the divisions of *varṇa* extended to the entire universe, what Brahmins could eat, hear, or come in contact with were restricted to those things associated with purity and cleanliness. A Brahmin household was expected to maintain purity at all times; the wife cooking a meal only after completely dousing her body in water, the husband only entering the home after washing his feet, all women being banished from the home during their menstrual cycle. Bodily fluids of any type were unclean, and as such even contact between the hand used for eating and the lips was expressly forbidden. Disposal of leftovers was to be conducted in a ritualistic manner in order to minimize exposure to those impure elements found in eaten food (Malamoud, 1998: 5). Children, from a very young age,

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<sup>1</sup> Personal interviews with various people, from many different castes, all showed a similar tendency to claim that the Brahmin caste was intrinsically more motivated to learn, and more adept at intellectual endeavors.

were taught to abhor contact with lower castes as their inherent impurity was assumed to be as filthy as one's own feces (Carstairs, 1961: 67). The traditional life of a Brahmin was meant to be one of complete ritualistic purity.

Along with the appearance of purity and perfection in Vedic understanding, the Brahmin tradition also placed a heavy emphasis upon proper speech. Sanskrit is often referred to as a perfect language and a language that may only be used perfectly (see §2.3.). Beyond Sanskrit, however, use of any language by a Brahmin was expected to be perfect. Lax pronunciation, flawed verb conjugation and inappropriate use of slang have been said by Brahmins to be the speech of other castes, and the lower status associated with them (Ingalls, 1959: 8). Should Sanskrit be misused in the context of a ritual, the consequences could be severe as the potency of a ritual is carried in the words themselves and their precise use. Subsequently, the power in words is emphasized across any languages being used, and as such it is frequently claimed that Brahmins speak the most pure or authentic form of any language<sup>2</sup>.

Thus, as has been shown, the ancient Brahmin tradition was one of severity, assumed personal purity, strict segregation, and intense erudition. All of these aspects, whether viewed as a part of the genetic makeup of Brahmins or expressly taught as necessary for successful completion of *dharma* helped to propagate a uniquely different caste dynamic from that of other caste traditions. In spite of caste reform from political and social influences, this notion about the Brahmin caste has been perpetuated to some degree, proving to be quite problematic as western influences came to gain more power throughout India.

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<sup>2</sup> These claims, while found throughout various forms of scholarly work (Ingalls, 1959: 8; Krishnamurti & Gwynn, 1985: 6; Sastry, 1994: 10; etc.), are most expressly found in personal interviews of various individuals from different castes.

### 1.2.3. The genesis of the Modern Brahmin

Previously, it was discussed how the British brought about certain social changes that influenced caste, turning it into a political system rather than one focused on religious dogma. This change, however, was not the only influence the British had upon the Indian subcontinent. From a technological standpoint, the British also brought many western technologies that were the object of desire for their Indian subjects. The following section will examine how British influence beyond that of the caste system caused a social change that impacted Brahmins in a very unique way. I will discuss how social and political change caused a sort of demonizing of the Brahmin caste to occur. With this, the Brahmin identity found itself under attack, causing the Modern Brahmin to find himself in a position of scrutiny by those around him. As such, the Modern Brahmin will be explained, showing how this conflict of identity results from constant pressure from various sources.

Cohn (1996: 66, 79) wrote that social change that came as a result of British influence was much more than an increased focus on the organization of the castes. Rather, this change was more a heightened attention to the issue of caste-based tradition and its influence on social behavior. Before western powers came to prevail in India, Brahmins especially had no need to change their way of life in order to adapt to social pressures. The traditional life of a Brahmin was one of perfection, with no higher way of living being possible. The British, however, did not see this as the case, but rather saw the Brahmin convention as one of vanity and baseless tradition. The British way of life was the new 'correct' way of life, and the power they wielded attested to that correctness.

From a Brahmin's perspective, westernization had its drawbacks just as readily as it had its benefits. Bairy (2003: 115-116) mentioned that while having running water was seen as a blessing, at the same time it was understood that leather was used to filter the water. The Brahmin tradition held that such a use would render the water impure, but if running water were desired, the issue would need to be dropped. A bicycle could offer the ability to travel in ease without much complication, but again the impurity of the bicycle's seat (made from leather), would need to be ignored. These and many other such introductions of impurities into daily living soon became commonplace, so much so that the traditions that had previously prescribed such impurities began to be abandoned.

Furthermore, Bairy (2010: 117) states that gaining a western education was highly desirable, especially for those Brahmins who wished to progress economically. However, as such education was only offered in larger cities, migration was necessary. With the large migrations that took place, many Brahmins were forced into living situations that by necessity were less restrictive in nature. Issues of commensality that had previously been commonplace (who one could eat with, where one could sleep, the need to bathe after contact with an untouchable, etc.) needed to be abandoned as well. In similar fashion, other traditions such as style of dress (Brahmin males would be shirtless, with a tuft of hair protruding from the crown of the head, and markers of sect identity on the forehead) and age of marriage (the issue of child marriage was rather quickly abandoned due to its perceived unfairness) were all relinquished as new western ideals were adopted. Importantly, however, we must note that the abandonment of such caste conventions was not forcibly done, as most participants wanted the benefits that would come

with such change<sup>3</sup>. Brahmins were so keen on westernization, not because of their caste, but rather due to their propensity towards education. It was their ambitious drive that pushed them to migrate to cities, take up more modern occupations, and abandon those traditions that would restrict such movements.

From the late 1800's and beyond, Brahmins dominated the realm of western education simply because other castes found it difficult to even enter primary and secondary education. Both Bairy (2010: 120) and Srinivas (1962: 50-51) explain that this disparity was greatly exaggerated because most government funding made higher education nearly free, though the majority of taxes that paid for such education came from the working, non-Brahmin castes. This Brahmin predominance was held in both areas of modern education and in state bureaucracy. As such, Brahmins found themselves in a key position of being the sole mediator between state authority and society. They mediated negotiations and perceptions of non-Brahmins and shaped the policies of administration towards that population so strongly that it wasn't until the 1910's that non-Brahmins began to obtain a more equal share in such realms. In order to combat the disparity that had formed between castes, the British held a policy of giving certain amounts of power to local self-governing bodies, with more specific preference being given to castes perceived as backwards economically. As such, many caste groups began to unite politically in order to form larger, and more powerful entities.

In various articulations of the need for better and stronger measures for non-Brahmin communities, the non-Brahmin organizations found the need to create, as it were, a Brahmin 'other' with whom a caustic and antagonistic engagement could be established. This 'other' did

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<sup>3</sup> For an interesting analysis of the impact modernism held on one Brahmin family, read "The Last Brahmin: Life and Reflections of a Modern-day Sanskrit Pandit" by Rani Siva Shankara Sarma (2002).

not represent those aspects of Hinduism that were viewed as virtuous (the religion of caste), but rather attached itself to the political Brahmin of previous decades - the merciless usurper of power and discriminator of lower castes. As a direct result, modern-day Brahmins in favor of social reform, who strove to appear casteless in public, were still scolded publicly because of their caste. This fierce attack on the Brahmin caste was even more difficult as Brahmins are only a minority in the community, democracy doing little to favor them. One Brahmin woman expressed her frustration with the situation, stating, "It is a criminal offense to abuse a Holeya (an untouchable community) by calling him a 'Holeya', but if you abuse a Brahmin by calling him a Brahmin one is called a reformer!"<sup>4</sup> While non-Brahmin political leaders agree that many aspects of their attack were elitist and farsighted, the consequences from this Brahmin 'othering' are still taking effect throughout the community.

With the arguments against this demonized political 'other', Brahmins found it prudent to reconfigure who they were. An identity distinguishes itself by the relationship between its sense of purpose and its current self-evaluation (Bairy, 2003: 247). As the Brahmin sense of purpose began to change along with the social evaluation of what it meant to be Brahmin, the identity itself began to change. It is that aspect of individual autonomy, who or what one is in the moment, that has been used as a safe-haven for the Modern Brahmin. The Modern Brahmin, as a result of pressure against his/her caste, finds it useful to establish a distinction between who s/he really is (the real Brahmin) and an idealized Brahmin (a valuation that may be removed from the issue of inherent caste qualities). Even during all of the political attacks against Brahmins, the idealized (religious) Brahmin did, and to some extent still does, carry with him/her certain

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<sup>4</sup> Ms. Spandana, 15 Aug 2000 (38 years old), in Bairy (2010: 247)



material and symbolic functions. Importantly, the idealized Brahmin is not at odds with issues of morality, ideals, abilities, kinship, marriage, purity, or untouchability. It is to this idealized Brahmin that the Modern Brahmin appeals, while fully understanding that virtue of birth is not sufficient to accord him/her idealized Brahmin status. In this, the Brahmin community is seemingly corporatized, with an apparent agreement as to who is an insider and who is merely a pretender. This new Brahmin identity is no longer merely taken on by virtue of birth, but rather is quite critically received by virtue of individual actions.

Thus, the Modern Brahmin, as a result of the adoption of Brahmin identity in addition to caste afforded at birth, must appeal to an idealized Brahmin on matters of purity, chastity, honesty, and service. Caste prescriptions no longer inhibit, but rather are seen as guidelines to make a man better<sup>5</sup>. It was held that the efforts of all Brahmins, as a collective whole, be focused to the institution of such a concept of intrinsic worth, rather than birth. The 1972 resolve by the *Akhila Karnatak Brahmana Maha Sabha* (a Brahmin political organization in Karnataka) stated three rules to determine the true measure of a Brahmin:

*Samskara* (Codes of conduct): Even as one is born a Brahmin, the real Brahminness is acquired only through good conduct and qualities, learning the Vedas, the strict following of everyday rituals.

*Sanghatane* (Organization): Even as we preserve our Brahminness, organizing the community is crucial so that we protect ourselves and our rights-duties [*dharma*].

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<sup>5</sup> A popular Telugu film, *Sankarabharanam* (Shankara's Ornament) (Viswanath 1980) popularized this appeal to the ideal Brahmin in its opening lines (referring to Brahmin guidelines "These things are not to restrict man or men, but are for the benefit of man.")

*Svavalambane* (Self-reliance): In today's context, it has become inevitable that we do not wait for the mercy of the government and look for individual initiatives so that we become self-reliant.

#### AKBMS (1989)

In foregrounding this notion of *samskara* (cultural upbringing rather than genetic make-up), Brahmins are able to retain their own personal notion of what it means to be a Brahmin, authenticating themselves through action. Maintaining this identity is quite difficult, however, as it is to be sought after on a daily basis. As such, those Brahmins who wish to maintain their Brahmin identity find themselves in a precarious situation of being constantly scrutinized by the public eye. Especially those Brahmins who are employed as priests or teachers find that their every deed is under analysis, it being decided for them whether they may worthily call themselves Brahmins. The respect that was previously afforded Brahmins due to their supposed intrinsic worth now comes only as the result of their individual actions.

One college woman mentioned this difficult respect, explaining that her roommates knew she and her family were Brahmins, and treated them with a 'deference' and 'respectful fear' (Bairy, 2010: 103). It is this attitude of deference and respectful fear that must be kept in mind during the following analysis. While the speech of Brahmins is under consideration, the use of these linguistic items will be shown in relation to ideas of status and solidarity, both of which come into play as we recall the attitudes afforded Brahmins in various situations. Thus, as shall be seen, the use of linguistic markers will act as markers of solidarity between members of the Brahmin caste, and subsequently (re)establish the status of the caste in relation to macro-societal hierarchy.

### **1.3. Religion and Linguistic Variation**

While factors that influence sociolinguistic variation have been shown in various forms, the current study focuses in large part on caste. While it would be useful to examine caste as the sole influencing factor in this variation, it is also important to note that caste, however unique it may be, is not and cannot be separated from religion. Hinduism, as a unified religion, is rather difficult to define as the variety of ways in which worship is performed varies just as much, if not more, than the pantheon of deities to whom worship is afforded. As such it is important to note the particularities of Brahmanism; proposed by some to be a religion in and of itself while others refer to it as a sect of Hinduism. More specifically, reference must be made to previous research in which religion has been addressed as a factor in sociolinguistic variation.

Studies have shown the various demographic factors that may influence linguistic variation. Factors such as literacy (Collins & Blot, 2003: 99), gender (Trudgill, 1972: 179), ethnicity (Wolfram, 1968: 2), sexual preference (Podesva 2008: 4-5), social group (Eckert, 2000: 169) and socio-economic status (Labov, 2006: 40) have all been shown to contribute to linguistic variation. Among one of the lesser-studied factors, however, is religion. Baker & Bowie (2010: 8) effectively showed that, even when found living in the same area, individuals that identify with different religious groups will participate in different vowel shifts from each other. Furthermore, while individuals from the 'out-group' from one area in particular were from different neighborhoods, attended different churches, and worked at different jobs, they consistently produced vowels in a similar manner that was unique from the other religious group. That said, it was shown how two groups possibly attempted to assert their differences in belief through their linguistic performance.

With the case at hand in India, we find that the religion, Hinduism, is the same among all individuals studied. What differs, though, is the method of worship as prescribed according to caste *dharma*. Many individuals have made the claim that the Brahmin caste is, itself, a religion unique from Hinduism due to its different worship practices (Sarma, 2007: 26). While this claim is not fully substantiated by all, it raises an interesting point as to the unique nature of being a Brahmin in relation to Hinduism in general. Those who are considered orthodox Brahmins will follow traditions that are similar in nature to each other, and while they may not have physical, interactional contact with each other, it will be shown that certain linguistic features are still maintained by the group. As such, while it may be claimed that religion is the influencing factor in these interactional situations, the nature of religious practice must be taken into account, showing that Hinduism for a Brahmin is different from Hinduism for someone from another caste.

#### **1.4. Style, Register, Dialect, and Indexicality**

Throughout this research the terms *dialect*, *register*, and *style* are used with frequency. It is important to properly define these terms so as to properly account for their use. The idea of a linguistic *style* has been used by various researchers in various contexts, but is perhaps best defined by Bucholtz (2009: 146). Bucholtz states that a *style* is “a unidimensional continuum between vernacular and standard that varies based on the degree of speaker self-monitoring in a given speech context”. Put plainly, a *style* is a graded series of linguistic variations with polar opposites (high vs. low, educated vs. uneducated, etc.) with variation occurring anywhere along that axis. It may be indicative of individual traits and abilities or of social influences. The

important distinction here is that a *style* is any way in which speech is modified along an axis of identification.

Ferguson (1994: 15-21) offers practical and useful definitions for the terms *dialect* and *register*. *Dialect*, he states, is a particular form of language used by “a group that operates regularly in a society as a functional element”. Specifically, this form of language “develop[s] identifying markers... different from language of other social groups” (ibid. 19). In this we see that social groups will develop a unique way of speaking. The features that make this way of speaking unique vary across dialects, but the unified structure among all speakers within the social group defines a style, or way of speaking, as a *dialect*. A *dialect* may be further described as a distinctive variety of any particular language that carries with it “local colorings” based upon a specific geographic location or social group (Wardhaugh, 2010: 41, 46). As such, the term *dialect* can be used to describe a style that is used in a unified way by any group of individuals. In this sense, it is identical to the concept of a linguistic *variety*, indicating a particular way in which a group of speakers uses language. The standardization of a *dialect*, be it regional or social, depends upon the interaction of speakers. Beyond discussion of interactional standardization, the term *dialect* also suggests a native base of speakers who use as their primary means of informal communication the *dialect* in question. Where deviation from the *dialect* occurs, speakers will adopt the speech of another group for any number of given reasons.

A *register*, on the other hand, relates more to “a communication situation that recurs regularly in a society” (Ferguson, 1994: 20). That said, while a *dialect* is a particular way of speaking for a social group, a *register* is a unique way of speaking in a certain context or situation. Hervey (1992: 189) provides a rather informative distinction between *register* and

*dialect*. In this work, he uses the term *register* to refer to “those *stylistic* aspects of language-use... where inferences drawn... reflect back on information about the language-user” (ibid. 192, Italics from original). Further, he explains that use of a *register* is a matter of a speaker’s linguistic repertoire being used to refer back to particular information about the speaker. It is important to distinguish, here, between the references made by a *dialect* and a *register*. In using a social *dialect* a speaker refers back to the social group to which s/he belongs. In using a social *register* however, the speaker refers back to the social stereotypes of that group. As such, use of the term *register* allows for a description of a linguistic code that carries with it, and is used to portray a unique set of cultural values. Thus, in the current research, the term *register* will be used to define the style used by Brahmins to identify with and establish caste-specific ideologies.

In the current study, it is important to note that what is being considered is a *register* of Brahmin speech rather than a Brahmin *dialect*. This distinction holds due to the fact that use of this particular linguistic style is not specific to the social group of Brahmins, but rather is used by Brahmins (as a choice) in order to imply, direct, or index concepts of caste ideology.

The idea of *indexicality* or *indexing* something has its roots in works by Peirce (1932: 12) on the importance of signs. In this work, the words are used frequently to denote any sort of pointing towards an item, be it cultural or otherwise. In essence, to *index* is to point or refer to it without necessarily carrying any portion of that item’s meaning within its form. Put simply, the form a word takes does not necessarily have any meaning other than its *indexed* meaning, or that meaning to which it points. Thus, *indexicality* will refer to those instances where something beyond the form of the word itself is being referenced.

## 1.5. Methodology

This section will include a description of the methodology used to collect, analyze, and utilize the data used for this research. Two subsections will be introduced: a discussion of the methods for data collection, and the methodology used for translating and analyzing the data collected.

### 1.5.1. Data Collection

Data collection for this research was done from August to December 2011 in Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh. This port city has a population of several million, and as such provided a large sampling size of both Brahmin and non-Brahmin speakers. In order to collect language data from Brahmins, I began by speaking with my Telugu teachers, both of whom were Brahmins. Through their contacts with friends and family (and through other chance-meetings) I was able to gather information from various Brahmins, each within the city. Non-Brahmin data collected came from acquaintances in the area, including employees of the study abroad program, friends made in the neighborhood, and strangers met on the street.

Data collected comes from various recordings from any and all individuals who gave permission to be recorded in various different situations: at home, at work (school, temple, etc.), and in social situations. Each individual recorded gave permission for me to digitally record their speech in the moment. Use of many recordings of informal conversations was agreed upon with the stipulation that only portions of the recording be disclosed, rather than the entire recording.

Several of the recordings are of informal discussions between, among, and about Brahmins. Recordings varied from formal speeches, formal situations at work (in a temple, in

school, a formal lecture, etc.), and informal conversations on the street, in the home, between friends and family. While I guided some of the more interview-like discussions with various questions such as, “Do Brahmins speak differently?” and “What does it mean to be a Brahmin?”, each recording is unique and unscripted. Some recordings are of public events in which recording was authorized prior by either the event organizers or due to the presence of the media. Many recordings took place in the homes of various Brahmins, each of which gave explicit permission for the researcher to record their speech, as well as to ask questions. During the period of data collection, I was primarily concerned with gathering as much variable data as possible concerning the way in which Brahmins speak. A large portion of the first recordings were interviews in which questions were explicitly asked regarding the way in which Brahmin speak. Later recordings involved longer instances of natural, unscripted, and unguided speech.

Each recording was documented in a spreadsheet with the information of speakers involved, including their caste, gender, approximate ages, education level, and economic status. While names and other identifying information was also recorded, each speaker was given a pseudonym in order to protect their anonymity.

Over the course of recording, over 900 hours of recorded speech, in both Telugu and English, were gathered. Of these recordings, some have been used in exegeses (see §5.) while others were used selectively as examples of aspiration (§4.), honorification (§3.), and lexical borrowing (§2.). No examples of non-Brahmin speech have been used outside of §5. All examples of Brahmin speech throughout the thesis have come from a selection of recordings representing a large sampling of individuals surveyed. Figure 1.1 shows this sampling.



**Figure 1.1. - Brahmin Speaker Demographics**

	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Highly Literate</b>	14	6	20
<b>Semi-Literate</b>	8	5	13
<b>Illiterate</b>	3	4	7
<b>High Class</b>	4	2	6
<b>Middle Class</b>	16	10	26
<b>Low Class</b>	5	3	8
<b>Total</b>	25	15	40

The distinction between literacy levels of Brahmin speakers is thus: highly literate (meaning having taken school and proficient in reading and writing), semi-literate (meaning having taken some school but not entirely proficient in reading or writing), and illiterate (meaning no education or lack of literacy ability). The distinction between classes here is indicative of socio-economic status: high class (meaning moderately to extremely wealthy), middle class (meaning not wealthy, but not living in poverty), and low class (not wealthy, living in poverty). Thus, with the 40 speakers shown here, I obtained a sufficiently broad sampling of Brahmins from various social strata. This sample was particularly important in Chapter 4 (see §4.5.) in looking at informal aspiration.

Each recording is stored in a secure, personal location to protect that anonymity as many recordings involve personal conversations that, were they made public, would disclose personal and sometimes private information. Frequent reference is made to these recordings throughout this research, being referenced as Miller (2011b: XXX) referring to individual recordings as ‘XXX’, representing the name of the actual sound file found in Miller (2011b).

### 1.5.2. Data translation and analysis

All data that is found in Chapter 2: Language Information, when not explicitly cited, came from various personal interviews with Brahmins of various ages, genders, levels of education and socioeconomic status. In these interviews, informants were requested to use specific details as to the use and appropriateness of use for each lexical item in question. Each example of a lexical item in the discussion of lexical borrowings came from Gwynn (1991: 1-574) while etymology was verified using Burrow & Emeneau (1984: 1-609).

Data used in Chapter 3: Honorifics and Politeness in Telugu initially came from Krishnamurti & Gwynn (1985: 2) but was all individually confirmed through detailed examination of recorded speech in various forms. Information regarding the use of vocative markers and terms of endearment and kinship terms was gathered through personal interviews.

The data used in Chapter 4: Aspiration as Indicative of Caste came from a detailed analysis of a sample of informal, Brahmin speech (see Figure 1.1.). The data was surveyed, listening for instances of aspiration. In each instance of aspiration, confirmed through spectral analysis, assuring a minimum of .05 seconds (50 milliseconds) length of aspiration, the broader phrase was tagged for analysis and translated.

A large portion of the recordings were in Telugu. As such, it was necessary to translate many of these sections, especially those sections that were to be used for this research. Primary translation was conducted by a native speaker of Telugu who is also a fluent speaker of English working as a translation assistant. I confirmed each primary translation, using my own knowledge of Telugu in combination with the aid of the Oxford Telugu-English dictionary

(Gwynn, 1991: 1-574) and in consultation with the original translator. Cultural meanings implicit behind many of the recordings, especially those found in Chapter 5: Meta-linguistic awareness of caste markers, were confirmed through follow-up interviews with Brahmin and non-Brahmin cultural consultants to assure for proper understanding of the cultural ideologies present in many recordings.

## 1.6. Outline of Thesis Structure

This following research is divided into five chapters. Chapter 2: Language Information will offer background information on Telugu, showing the linguistic history of the language, including the degree to which words have been borrowed from other languages, particularly Sanskrit. It will also include a brief description of Sanskrit as a spoken language, discussing the ways in which it has influenced Telugu. Finally it will conclude by showing the ways in which certain lexical borrowings are incorporated by individuals to identify themselves as retaining certain cultural ideologies consistent with the Brahmin caste. Chapter 3: Honorifics and Politeness will introduce concepts of honorification and politeness markers in Telugu, showing the ways in which these markers are used to establish notions of status by individuals. Chapter 4: Aspiration as Indicative of Caste will discuss aspiration in depth, showing the ways in which aspiration is used in Telugu, including its formal and informal use in speech. The use of aspiration will be shown to be a part of the Brahmin register, used in informal speech emphatically to index caste identity and ideologies. Chapter 5: Meta-linguistic Awareness of Caste Markers will discuss various instances of meta-pragmatic discourse and the ways in which individuals perceive the Brahmin register, including the cultural ideologies that are portrayed and

interpreted by use of the register. Chapter 6: Social Aspects of a Register will conclude by re-visiting each topic of discussion, showing how the Brahmin register allows individuals to identify with their caste, act as a marker of solidarity, and (re)establish a certain degree of caste status.

## Chapter 2: Language Information

### 2.1. Introduction

Telugu holds a unique position as perhaps one of the most widely spoken, yet understudied languages of modern time. With more than 74 million native speakers (Census, 2001), Telugu ranks higher in number of native speakers than many other highly studied languages including French, Italian, Korean, Tamil, and Vietnamese (Lewis, 2009). Nevertheless, the amount of linguistic literature that has been published on the language remains rather scant to say the least. With that in mind, the current study hopes to expand the knowledge base regarding sociolinguistic data on Telugu with regards to caste variation.

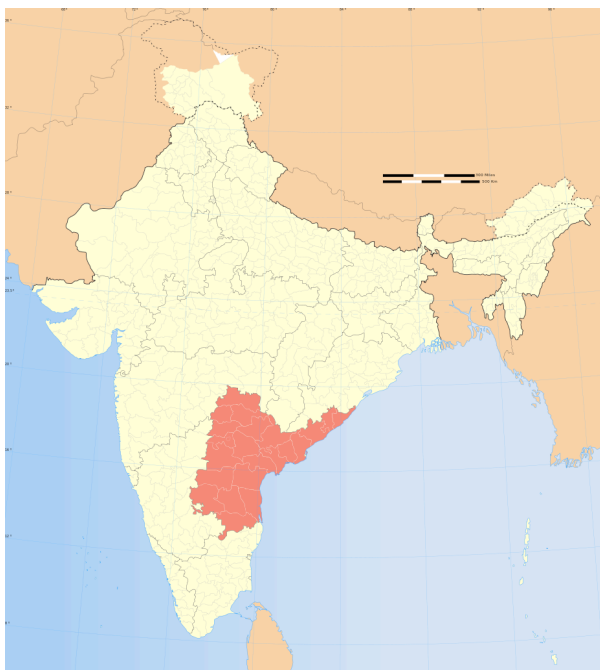
In this chapter, I will introduce Telugu, showing the ways in which it is currently used while also examining its history as a spoken and written language. I will also discuss the linguistic state of Andhra Pradesh, showing the influence other languages have had on Telugu within the geographic area, while also considering the ways in which these borrowings still retain cultural significance. Following the discussion of Telugu, I will also introduce Sanskrit as a spoken language, showing the ways in which it has been used historically, and the way in which it is currently used. Specifically, I will discuss the use of Sanskrit borrowings within Telugu, showing that certain borrowings have become fully incorporated into the lexicon while others are used by Brahmins as indexical of their caste identity. These caste-specific borrowings will be discussed showing the ways in which Sanskrit borrowings may index Brahmin identity.

## 2.2. Telugu

### 2.2.1. A spoken language

Telugu (ISO 639-3: tel) is a Dravidian language, belonging to the South-Central branch of the Dravidian family (Krishnamurti, 2003: 21). It is spoken natively by over 74 million people, primarily in the South-Eastern Indian state of Andhra Pradesh. The language is one of the Schedule Languages of the Republic of India, and one of the four languages of classical, Dravidian literature.

#### Image 2.1. - Andhra Pradesh



Historically, the current geographic area of Andhra Pradesh has been under control of various governing parties, each of which brought various degrees of linguistic influence. For this reason, borrowings from Sanskrit (Brahminic influence), Persian (Moghul rule), Urdu (Muslim Nizam) and English (British Raj and further westernization) are found throughout the language. The most complete grammar of the modern language was published in 1985 (Krishnamurti &

Gwynn, 1985), showing the various ways in which a ‘standard’ variety of the language is used. With this grammar, however, a large amount of ‘borrowed’ material is bypassed as it is not indicative of the ‘standard’ dialect being considered (ibid. 3). While other attempts have been made to describe the language as a whole, or as a spoken language establishing a dichotomy between ‘educated’ and ‘uneducated dialects’, none of these descriptions have adequately addressed the issues of socially based variation. As such, the current examination of the language will use these previous works, along with personally collected data, to show certain ways in which social stratification is (re)established through linguistic use.

Telugu is used as the lingua franca for most interactions throughout the state of Andhra Pradesh. While English is taught in schools and is used as a second language by members of society that have received such education, many schools, including universities, teach most courses in Telugu. English is only used when a more common, extra-Indian lingua franca is needed, though its use is rare. For purposes of this study especially, it is enough to state that Telugu is the language of the home, school, business, and everyday interactions.

### 2.2.2. Linguistic influence

*Viṣaalaandhra*, the first ‘linguistic’ state to be formed in the newly independent nation, came into being on October 1, 1953, later to be re-formed to include more Telugu-speaking areas to the south under the name of Andhra Pradesh. This state, having been formed under pretenses of linguistic unity with a vast majority of individuals speaking Telugu as their first language, was historically the seat of multiple regimes, forming the basis of multiple areas of linguistic

influence. As such, in the current discussion of lexical borrowings it is important to give note to the particularities of linguistic, and more specifically, lexical influence on the Telugu language.

While Telugu is now considered the official language of the entire region, different areas within the state have had different linguistic influences over the centuries. Some linguists divide the state into four regions based upon dialectal variations: Coastal, Kalinga, Telangana, and Rayalaseema. The following chart from Sastry (1994: 2) shows the different districts and the dialectal region to which they belong:

**Figure 2.2. - Telugu Dialect Areas by District**

<b>Coastal</b>	<b>Kalinga</b>	<b>Telangana</b>	<b>Rayalaseema</b>
East Godavari	Srikakulam	Adilabad	Anantapur
West Godavari	Vijayanagaram	Hyderabad	Chittoor
Guntur	Visakhapatnam	Karimnagar	Cuddapah
Krishna		Khammam	Kurnool
Nellore		Mahubnagar	
Prakasam		Medak	
		Nalgonda	
		Nizamabad	
		Rangareddi	
		Warangal	

In using a vocabulary survey, Krishnamurti & Gwynn (1985) divided the region differently, calling the Telangana dialect the ‘Northern Dialect’, placing Mahubnagar as a part of the ‘Southern Dialect’ (seen above as Rayalaseema) along with Nellore and Prakasam, the ‘Eastern Dialect’ consists only of Visakhapatnam and Srikakulam, while the ‘Central Dialect’ was comprised of the remaining districts. In this distinction current occupational vocabulary was



the main factor, rather than extra-lexical (i.e. - phonetic, prosodic, etc.) reasons for dialectal divisions. The current study will follow Sastry (1994: 2) and his dialect labels. See the following image to note the geographic region occupied by each dialectal region.

**Image 2.3. - Map of Telugu Dialect Areas<sup>6</sup>**



The Telangana region is perhaps most noted for its historical center of Muslim rule under the different Nizam rulers based in Hyderabad (Chakravarthi, 2009: 49). This is perhaps the greatest influencing factor on the linguistic variety associated with this region. During the Nizam's rule, Persian and Urdu were the official languages while Telugu was viewed as a lower, inferior language spoken by the 'backward' classes (Sastry, 1994: 4). For this reason Urdu, especially, has exerted the largest amount of influence on the Telugu of Telangana region. To this day there still exists a small portion of the population there who speak Urdu as a first language.

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<sup>6</sup> Map Copyright, Brianna Purinton © 2013.

On the other hand, the Coastal and Kalinga regions have had more influence from the language of Hinduism: Sanskrit (Sastry, 1994: 10). As such, and because the current study looks at speech instances in the Kalinga region (looking at Visakhapatnam in particular), I will be discussing the use of Sanskrit borrowings, including reasons for Sanskrit influence and use of the language.

Representations of Telugu speech and orthography in this thesis will be found in *italics*. Furthermore, for simplicity of transcription, and to avoid highlighting the complexities of vowel harmony, Sandhi, vowel length, and other dialectal variations that may occur, a standardized transliteration will be used rather than standard IPA (International Phonetic Alphabet) symbols. The following figures show the transliteration used for both vowels and consonants.

**Figure 2.4. - Standardized Transliteration of Telugu Vowels**

<b>Transliteration</b>	<b>IPA</b>
<i>a/aa (ā)</i>	[a]/[a:]
<i>i/ii (ī)</i>	[ɪ]/[i:]
<i>u/uu (ū)</i>	[ʊ]/[u:]
<i>e/ee (ē)</i>	[ɛ]/[e:]
<i>ai</i>	[aɪ]
<i>o/oo (ō)</i>	[o]/[o:]
<i>au</i>	[aʊ]

**Figure 2.5. - Standardized Transliteration of Telugu Consonants**

<b>Transliteration</b>	<b>IPA</b>
<i>k - kh</i>	[k] - [k <sup>h</sup> ]
<i>g - gh</i>	[g] - [g <sup>h</sup> ]
<i>c - ch</i>	[tʃ] - [tʃ <sup>h</sup> ]
<i>j - jh</i>	[dʒ] - [dʒ <sup>h</sup> ]
<i>ṭ - ṭh</i>	[ʈ] - [ʈ <sup>h</sup> ]
<i>ḍ - ḍh</i>	[ḍ] - [ḍ <sup>h</sup> ]
<i>ṇ</i>	[ɳ]
<i>t - th</i>	[t] - [t <sup>h</sup> ]
<i>d - dh</i>	[d] - [d <sup>h</sup> ]
<i>n - ñ</i>	[n] - [ɲ]
<i>p - ph</i>	[p] - [p <sup>h</sup> ]
<i>b - bh</i>	[b] - [b <sup>h</sup> ]
<i>m</i>	[m]
<i>y</i>	[j]
<i>r</i>	[ɾ]
<i>l</i>	[l]
<i>w</i>	[v]
<i>ś</i>	[ʃ]
<i>s - sh</i>	[s] - [s <sup>h</sup> ]
<i>ṣ</i>	[ʂ]

### 2.3. Sanskrit

A major portion of the argument in favor of certain caste-specific ideologies that are inherently tied with particular usage of Telugu can be summed up in one simple connection: the Brahmin register implies a ‘Sanskritized’ form of the language, and as such speakers of that form must be those authorized to speak Sanskrit (in any of its forms). Sanskrit is the language of deity,

scriptures, and of ritual. It is (or was at one point) the scholarly language of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism (Pollock, 2006: 1-10). Its importance in the history of India cannot be overstated as the large majority of dramatic, historical, scientific, and religious records are written in the language. As such an important language in the history of the sub-continent, it is important to define to what degree Sanskrit has influenced, and continues to influence, vast portions of Indian society.

Sanskrit (ISO 639-3: san) is a member of the Indo-Iranian subfamily of Indo-European languages. The original name of the language itself, *saṃskṛta*, indicates in itself the contrivance of man. The name, meaning ‘refined or purified speech’, can be contrasted with any other language, or Prakrit in that they are ‘original, natural, normal’ or derived from the natural ebb and flow of language creation (Sawhney, 2009: 5). Sanskrit, in this sense, is a language ‘purified’ by prescriptivism to create the language of deity. While the language has been said to have existed millennia before it was written, the oldest grammar of the language was written in roughly 500 BCE by Panini (Wujastyk, 1993: 5) and continues to be used as a prescription of the language and its use. One notable factor is its seemingly immovable nature, it appears that it has not evolved as most languages do. While research has shown that Sanskrit has had various periods in its life (Rapson, 1904: 436), it continues to be seen as a timeless language of divinity that is seemingly impervious to socio-historical change. One of the main reasons for this is the actual use of the language and the requisite perfection required in ritualistic use (Deshpande, 1993: 25). As it was, and to a large degree continues to be an orally transmitted language, taught as a second language, the question arises as to the actual use of Sanskrit and if it truly can be called a ‘living’ language.

Sawhney (2009: 6) describes the important distinction of Sanskrit as a spoken language in contrast with other languages. She explains that reference is made in the *Sundara Kāṇḍa* of the *Rāmāyaṇa* to the use of Sanskrit, though not as a language, but rather as a way of speaking. In it, Hanuman, the monkey, wonders how to speak to Rama's abducted wife, Sita. Since he is a monkey, he wonders if he should address her using *saṃskṛta vāc* or 'refined language' as opposed to the language of, say, a monkey. In this context *saṃskṛta* is used as an adjective, defining a type of language. This distinction between a purified language and any other language, is an important idea behind the language and its uses.

A comparison may be made between Latin and Sanskrit, as both languages have constituted the language of scholarship in the past. Sanskrit held the position of authority as the language of education, scholarship, poetry, etc. as each of these were also included in the all important context of religion. Teaching, even in some instances during the colonial period in India, has frequently been conducted in Sanskrit (ibid. 9). Sanskrit was used not only as the medium for written scholarship, but also for communication of novel ideas between intellectuals. The degree to which it was used in this way was so pervasive that "even when Sanskrit was not resorted to, the literary version of a language was so Sanskritized that it was unintelligible to ordinary men" (Srinivas, 1962: 100). While not to the same degree as it had been previously, to this day, Sanskrit continues to be taught as a literary and classical language in most Indian institutes of higher education.

The use of Sanskrit as a communicative tool between the realm of the humans and that of deity is perhaps its most commonly noted use. Heesterman (1985: 15) explains that Sanskrit is the language of gods, and as such, ritualistic communication is done between the ritualist and

deity, not necessarily with the devotee for whom the ritual is being performed. While this communication is in the form of rote recitation, and not necessarily as a conversation, it still constitutes a use of language with an interlocutor. Thus, its use as a ritualistic tool is perhaps the first, and most prominent exposure most Indians have to the language. Because of this, its use is most often associated with Brahmin speech, as ritualists are inevitably Brahmin priests.

The use and learning of Sanskrit is not unique to the Brahmin caste. Any of the highest castes were allowed educational opportunities historically, though the Brahmin caste held the responsibility to obtain education as a caste duty. With this in mind, many will refer to Brahmins as the main learners of this ‘traditional’ knowledge. Any use of the language is restricted to that realm which is associated with the highest *varṇa*, and as such any relation to the language or its use still brings to mind the concept of the Brahmin caste. In many instances, an appeal to the traditional orthodoxy of the Hindu religion brings with it that connection to the ancient Brahmin tradition and the associated use of Sanskrit (Srinivas, 1962: 48).

While more modern use of Sanskrit is limited to scholarly study of historical texts and ritualistic recitations, there do exist certain Brahmin villages in which it is learned as a native language.<sup>7</sup> In fact, some reports state that it is spoken natively by as few as 3,000 individuals (Lewis, 2009) or as many as 14,135 (Census, 2001). That being said, however, Sanskrit as it is learned in schools, taught to priests, and recited in rituals, continues to be the same as the language used hundreds of years ago. In that sense its use is not innovative or novel, as many assume ‘living’ languages to be. Thus, it has been argued that it is a ‘dead’ language (Pollock,

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<sup>7</sup> See news article by Kushala, 2005.

2006: 89), though it continues to be used on a daily basis, at least by ritualists and specialists of the Vedic tradition.

That said, Sanskrit as a spoken language, whatever its purpose or speaker's ability to contrive novel and unique constructions, continues to play an influencing role on language in India. Looking at Telugu specifically, I will divide the types of borrowings from Sanskrit into a few sub-categories: words that have become incorporated into the language, occupation specific terminology, and other borrowings. It is this last category of other borrowings that will be shown to best portray the caste-specific ideology of a Brahmin register.

#### **2.4. Borrowings and Caste**

The borrowing of lexical items is a common result where widespread bilingualism occurs (Appel & Muysken, 1987: 153). In the case of the current study, borrowings of Sanskrit words into the native lexicon of Telugu has resulted from centuries of bilingualism among Telugu Brahmins. As a result, many of these borrowings have become fully incorporated into the language by all speakers. That this has happened is not a surprise, as various studies of dialectal variation among castes, discussed below, have suggested that Brahmins maintain a unique way of speaking. Furthermore, studies have also shown that influence from higher strata will sift down into the speech of lower strata (Bright, 1966: 313). Nevertheless some of these, and other studies, make mention of a unique use of lexical items in caste-specific speech. As such, it is prudent to discuss these cases to further understand the way in which lexical items have been shown to be unique to a particular caste.

Shanmugam (1965: 59) argued for a unique set of lexical items specific to various castes, referred to as ‘caste markers’. In this study, it was shown that such lexical items did not occur with similar meaning in other castes. “The peculiarities of the Brahmin dialects are restricted to a few lexical items... The hearer can, however, determine whether the speaker is a Brahmin or non-Brahmin at the end of a few sentences because of the ubiquitous nature of these lexical items” (ibid. 86). While it would seem as though this study constitutes a strong case for caste-unique lexical items, it is important to note that the study only examined kinship terms, neglecting a much wider variety of lexical items. Nevertheless, it still showed that each caste group studied - 12 in total - had certain unique markers of kinship. The Brahmin caste in particular held the greatest number of unique kinship terms such as *ammaanji* [amma:ndʒi] ‘mother’s mother’ and *aatrikaari* [a:ʃika:ri] ‘wife’, with those castes only slightly lower in the hierarchy often attempting to imitate and borrow the Brahmin terms in efforts at upward caste mobility. In this, it is observed that the use of these unique terms indicate a (certain) prestige to which speakers appeal in use of these terms, similar to the previous mention of innovation from above (Trudgill, 1974: 31).

Bright (1960: 424) discusses how the speech of Brahmins is often most innovative insofar as conscious levels of language change are concerned. This primarily deals with elements of lexical borrowing and semantic change, showing that incorporation of Sanskrit borrowings is something done most frequently by the Brahmin caste, as they are most frequently familiar with Sanskrit to such a degree as to be able to incorporate certain lexical items where desired. With this we see that influence in the language, at least insofar as lexical items are concerned, comes in large part from the higher stratum.



The idea of a change from above, or as a part of the level of conscious awareness, as introduced by Labov (1994: 78), starting with the Brahmin caste, was further iterated by Ryali (1973: 166) as he showed the way in which, what he terms the ‘Brahmin dialect,’ differs from the ‘non-Brahmin dialect’. While the main distinction made by Ryali here is, again, phonetic in nature, mention is still made to some instances of lexical variation, specifically in occupational terminology (e.g. - items found in a temple, within the classroom, to be used in scientific study, etc.) showing that the use of unique lexical items can be an indicator of caste.

While it is true that detailed studies of lexical borrowings in South Indian languages are more scarce than are studies of phonetic variation between caste dialects, we are still able to see in the few references made that the Brahmin caste in particular will employ unique lexical items in order to distinguish themselves from other, non-Brahmin speakers (McCormack, 1960: 80). As such, the following analysis of lexical borrowings from Sanskrit will be used to show certain areas where a Brahmin-centric speech register occurs.

#### 2.4.1. Incorporated borrowings

Many borrowings from Sanskrit have become incorporated into the common, every-day speech of people from all walks of life. The reason for such borrowings may vary, but their complete incorporation is not disputed. Some of these words carry distinct phonetic markers that indicate their etymology in certain instances (see § 4.5.). Nevertheless, they have been borrowed to such a degree that their phonology and (sometimes) orthography have adapted to the phonological system of Telugu. The current analysis will only show the words as they have been borrowed without any attempt to show phonetic change in the borrowing process. Because

spelling and pronunciation may vary from the original Sanskrit, it is important to note that many native speakers of Telugu do not recognize some of these words as borrowings.

A few examples of common, fully incorporated borrowings may be seen below. All examples have been taken from Burrow & Emeneau (1984).

(1)	Sanskrit Word	Borrowing	Meaning
	<i>akkaa</i>	<i>akka</i>	‘elder sister’
	<i>attā</i>	<i>atta</i>	‘elder sister’s husband’
	<i>ambā</i>	<i>amma</i>	‘mother’
	<i>argalikaā</i>	<i>argalamu</i>	‘wooden bolt’
	<i>kaṭa-</i>	<i>gaḍḍi</i>	‘grass’
	<i>koṭṭa-</i>	<i>kōṭa</i>	‘fort, stronghold’
	<i>sedhā</i>	<i>eedu</i>	‘hedgehog’
	<i>tamanga-</i>	<i>tamagamu</i>	‘platform’

#### 2.4.2 Occupation specific borrowings

A large majority of Sanskrit borrowings into Telugu deal with scientific and educational terminologies. These terms are known borrowings, and their use indexes the field in which they are used. Nothing of their use is caste-specific beyond the fact that up until even 50 years ago the majority of persons in positions of higher education (and thus those who used such terms in Telugu) were Brahmin.

**Figure 2.6. - Educational/Scientific Borrowings**

Borrowing	Meaning	Field of Use
<i>mṛttikaśāstram</i>	soil science	Agriculture
<i>mṛdulaasthi</i>	cartilage	Anatomy
<i>samweedaka</i>	sensory	Anatomy

<b>Borrowing</b>	<b>Meaning</b>	<b>Field of Use</b>
<i>guruḍu</i>	Jupiter	Astronomy/Astrology
<i>bhaaswaram</i>	phosphorus	Chemistry
<i>tuttunaagam</i>	zinc	Chemistry
<i>tribhujam</i>	triangle	Geometry
<i>bhaaṣa</i>	‘language’	Linguistics
<i>bhaaṣaantariikaraṇam</i>	‘translation’	Linguistics
<i>nighaṇṭuwu</i>	dictionary, lexicon	Linguistics
<i>trayjya</i>	radial	Mathematics
<i>trithaakaraṇam</i>	trisection	Mathematics
<i>bhiṣakku</i>	ayurvedic physician	Medicine
<i>naasaarandhram</i>	nostril	Medicine

Beyond the realm of science and education, there are borrowings that are specific to the occupation of Vedic ritualist and as such have a certain connotation with their use. As an example, the Sanskrit borrowing *naamam*, meaning ‘name’, is the term used in infant naming ceremonies. Use of this term indexes the naming ceremony in particular, including the action of a Brahmin priest looking at suitable syllables with which to begin a child’s name, the performance of the naming ritual itself, and the writing of that *naamam* by the child (with the parents guiding the infant’s hand) in a tray of uncooked rice. The Telugu word *peru* ‘name’ on the other hand, is used in any other instance in which a name is discussed. Thus, an individual that says *naamam ceppaṇḍi* ‘say (the) name, please’ is speaking of an infant’s name as it is being given during a ceremony, though saying *peru ceppaṇḍi* ‘say (the) name, please’ means to ask an individual to speak the name of an individual, perhaps of his/her own, in any number of situations. During a

naming ceremony to which I was witness, in which all present were Brahmin, the word *peru* was never heard, even when being asked what my own name was. It was later mentioned to me that the sanctity of the ceremony itself seemingly required use of the more sacred Sanskrit word *naamam*.

Similarly, the term *naamam* also has another meaning, mainly the mark worn on the forehead by followers of the god Vishnu. This mark, observable by two white lines in the shape of a 'V' and a red line in the middle, is most commonly worn by Brahmins as a sign of their devotion. The mark of a *bottu* or symbol placed upon the forehead is not unique to the Brahmin caste, though the mark of a Vaishnavite (follower of Vishnu) or a Shaivite (follower of Shiva, marked with three white horizontal lines upon the forehead) is a common feature of a Brahmin, especially one who still follows the daily rituals of recitation of the *Gayatri Mantra*, bathing, and body marking.

In dress, we find various caste-specific items. Brahmin men are perhaps most traditionally recognized by their wearing of the sacred thread (*yajñoopavītam* or *jhandhyamu*); the hemp thread draped over the left shoulder across the chest. While tradition holds that the highest three *varna* may wear this thread as a mark of their 'twice-born' status, reference to it and its use most commonly indexes Brahmins. Noting when one is worn is a common indicator of a high-caste status, and reference to one carries similar indication.

The traditional *dhoti* is a cloth worn by men, wrapped around the waist. The Brahmin tradition is to take the lower portion of the front and pass it between the legs, tucking in the back (*kacca*). This is also the traditional way of tying a *sari* by Brahmin women. More modern Brahmins will not wear clothes in this traditional way, though it is still seen on temple priests.

In ritualistic actions, a frequent reference is made to the *panchangam* or ‘astrological calendar/almanac’. This almanac is used as a reference for anyone who wishes to consult *jyootisam* or ‘astrology’, in order to have the benefits of the stars, and gods, in performing almost any action, including building a new home, naming a child, opening a business, performing a *puja* (‘devotional worship’), getting a job, getting married, etc. While an almanac is available for anyone who wishes to purchase it, the ability to read it is something that is taught by Brahmins to other Brahmins. Most practicing Hindus will consult a local temple priest for advice as to their fate as determined by the movement of the stars.

Now, it is important to note that these, and many more words, have been incorporated into Telugu for their various purposes. While the words themselves are not necessarily indexical of the Brahmin caste, specific reference to them in speech demonstrates a knowledge and familiarity with these terms and their use. This knowledge and familiarity are quite indexical of the Brahmin caste as they immediately identify with the cultural values of that caste. These indexical purposes of pointing towards items that are stereotypically associated with Brahmins help in understanding why they may be referred to as indexing Brahmins in particular.

#### 2.4.3. Scolding terminology

Among all of the previously observed borrowings, there is a certain degree of indexicality to cultural elements that are always associated with the Brahmin caste. Importantly, however, there are other borrowings that are used exclusively by Brahmins, and as such are exclusively indexical of that caste. These borrowings, when heard by any Telugu speaker, are immediately taken as markers of the speaker’s caste. The majority of these words, if not all of them, will

never be used in public situations, but are rather more intimate terms directed towards children, relatives, and close friends in informal speech.

The cultural meaning behind certain scolding terms is indicative of historical ideologies regarding purity, duty, and respect. When speaking to a misbehaving person of younger age (i.e. - a young child, or an adult that is younger than the speaker), the speaker has the option to call him or her a name that is seemingly highly derogatory. One such term, the adjective *apraachuraa*, most easily translated as ‘westerner’, indexes the belief that things that come from beyond the oceans are impure.<sup>8</sup> The impurities inherent in these foreigners also comes from the actions of these westerners (eating of meat, drinking liquor, etc.), which are not the actions of a devout Brahmin. It is typically said to a male, as it carries the masculine vocative suffix *-raa* (see §3.3.3.). A similar adjective might be to call someone, male or female, *apraacheppu*, ‘uncultured’. This also denotes the idea that, in being a Brahmin one must behave as expected, and when such ‘culture’ is not found, their actions should be called out. Both of these terms use a prefix *apraa-*, a derivative of the Sanskrit word *apara* meaning ‘inferior, hind’. In this use, the prefix itself indicates inferiority, while the adjective is meant to further humiliate and subject the recipient to the way, and ideologies, to which they should be conforming. Other common adjectives of reference - used as defining features of the person being scolded - are words such as *cheeta*, ‘waste’ and *ceetakani*, ‘useless’.

Perhaps the most famous scolding term is *vedhava*, coming from the Sanskrit word *vidhava* meaning ‘widow,’ in its original form, was meant as a label for a woman who had lost her husband. The concept itself indexes the belief that a woman, as a part of her duty, should not

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<sup>8</sup> This was relayed to me in a personal interview with an elderly Brahmin woman who explained the reason why children are sometimes called *apraachura*.

outlive her husband. It is because of this belief that the practice of self-immolation upon the husband's funeral pyre was, and in some instances continues to be, practiced in India today. This belief of the impurity of a widow can be seen by more orthodox Brahmin widows who maintain a shaven head, wear a white *sari* with no *sari* blouse, and never remarry. Interestingly, however, the term *vedhava* as it is used today, is actually a term used to speak to males only. In calling a man (or more frequently a boy) a 'widow,' they are reminding them of the necessity to respect and adhere to caste duty or *dharma*. It is this adherence that Brahmin parents expect their children to maintain, and when necessary they will call them a term to remind them of that duty. The term *vedhava* however has become so ameliorated in its frequent use that it is (in)famous as being a common 'filler word' in Brahmin speech, as many believe most Brahmins use it as a term of reference for any other person beneath their status.<sup>9</sup> The female counterpart for this word is *munda*, though it is only heard on occasion when a young girl is being reprimanded harshly. While this term also refers to widowhood, it is not as charged as *vedhava*.

Certain violent phrases may be used, though the desire expressed in the phrase is only meant as a deterrent to certain behavior, and not meant as a literal desire. One in particular, *ni moham maṇḍa*, means literally, 'may your face burn'. While this is not the desire of the speaker that a young child's face actually be burned, it does act as a way for the parent (or elder who is scolding) to call into focus the fact that the child is misbehaving and needs correction. No reference is made here to the practice of throwing acid upon the face of an individual, as there is no evidence in meta-pragmatic discussions regarding this phrase that its intention means anything more than to scold verbally and bring back into alignment an individual who has

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<sup>9</sup> This term is used with most frequency in Telugu cinema when film makers attempt to portray a Brahmin in a non-spiritual way, i.e. - in a mocking sense.

strayed. This phrase may refer to an idea that the face may become ‘red’ with shame of one’s actions, though this was neither confirmed nor denied in any interviews.

The term to ‘come here and die’ *vaccitagulade* implies that a misbehaving individual should come to the location of the speaker in order to be reprimanded and set in order. Indicating to a child (in particular) that they should come to the indicated spot to receive verbal punishment may be compared to a ‘time-out’ in western society, as it is a specific location used to modify behavior. While it does not indicate a period of time to be spent in this modification, it does show that modification is needed, and that it will be given in the indicated location. This term is frequently used as ‘may your face burn’.

One final term that is not considered a scolding term, but is rather indicative of the Brahmin caste, is the use of the kinship term *bamma* to mean ‘grandmother.’ In Telugu, terminology exists for both paternal and maternal grandmothers (*tatamma* and *ammamma* respectively). The word *bamma* is used only by Brahmins when referring to their grandmother on either side, or when speaking to/of an elderly woman that is seen as a grandmotherly figure (see §3.3.4.). Anytime in which this is used, the speaker is immediately identified as a Brahmin.

It should be reiterated that these terms, both scolding and familial in nature, are used only by Brahmins, and when they are heard will immediately indicate the caste of the speaker. While it may happen that non-Brahmins may use these terms, such use will still index the Brahmin caste and will indicate to the audience that the speaker is either a) Brahmin or b) attempting to sound like a Brahmin (either in mockery or otherwise). The nature of these lexical items is such that their use will necessarily index the caste, and as such are taken to be associative of it.



## 2.5. Conclusion

As has been seen, Telugu presents an interesting language for the study of caste-unique variation. It has been shown how historical influence has created a situation where Sanskrit borrowings have been incorporated into Telugu, and how the use of particular borrowings indexes various ideas and cultural ideologies, specifically how certain borrowings from Sanskrit index ideas that are related in many ways to the Brahmin caste. Though higher education and scientific study is currently available to anyone, historical records have shown that the vast majority of those within the field up until independence were members of the Brahmin caste. Similarly, any indication of Vedic ritual is also an indication of those who practice such ritual, namely the Brahmins. While use of Sanskrit borrowings highlights the fact that they are Sanskrit and not Telugu words, their use is also indicative of those individuals who are considered most highly trained in Sanskrit, i.e. - the Brahmins. With that, any use of those terms mentioned as being specific to Brahmin use will necessarily index the caste as they are used almost exclusively by Brahmins or by non-Brahmins in various ways to index the caste.

## **Chapter 3: Markers of Politeness as Indicative of Status**

### **3.1. Introduction**

In any given instance of interactional speech, certain linguistic forms may be used to mark the status of those individuals involved (either directly or indirectly). Included in this list are the speaker(s), addressee(s), bystanders, and non-present individuals that remain the topic of conversation. In each of these instances we find that the status of each individual may potentially come into play, thus necessitating use of linguistic cues to establish that individual's status in relation to the status of others.

Notions of status and relation are established using different methods in different cultures. More specifically, the use of linguistic markers of politeness and honorification can be manipulated in various ways depending on the language being used and the cultural ideologies in place as a part of that language (Agha, 1994: 280). In examining India in particular, notions of caste hierarchy and status that are unique to the subcontinent allow for a particularly interesting study of those linguistic markers used to index honorification and politeness.

In the following chapter, literature will be examined showing certain theories that have established themselves as bases for the study of linguistic markers of politeness and honorification. After this review of previous work, I will look specifically at these markers in Telugu, showing how their use can establish notions of status and solidarity. It will be shown that various markers of politeness and honorification are used by Brahmins to re-establish the status afforded to their caste by Vedic prescriptions.

### 3.2. Previous work

This section will highlight previous work on the use of honorific pronouns, markers of politeness, and the use of honorific registers along with the social stereotypes associated with their use. While some research involves languages spoken in India directly, other research is more broad in nature and will be examined as a theoretical framework with which to analyze specific instances of honorification and markers of politeness.

#### 3.2.1. Honorific pronouns and forms of address

In any given instance of linguistic interaction, the use of pronouns and other forms of address are necessary as markers of individuals that are - either immediately or indirectly - a part of the interactional moment. Use of these markers is not without consequence, however, as each marker carries with it a particular form of “social evaluation of respect or deference to the individual thus picked out” (Agha, 1994: 278). While many notable studies have been conducted showing the ways in which these pronouns and address forms are used, and the way such usage creates a distinct reaction, only a few will be noted here.

One of the single most influential frameworks for the study of honorific pronouns was conducted by Brown & Gilman (1960: 253). In this study, the dichotomous pronominal contrast in European languages - known as T - V (from the French distinction of *tu* and *vous*, indicating formal and informal) - is introduced, noting concepts of power and solidarity as marked through use of these pronouns. Power is defined as the ability for an individual “to control the behavior of the other” (ibid. 255), while solidarity is established as a likeness between individuals that comes from a similar social group (i.e. - caste, religion, occupation, education, class, etc.). While

subsequent research has raised certain criticisms for this research (Friedrich, 1986: 270; Joseph, 1987: 259), it is still particularly important to note the ideas of power and solidarity as we examine individual instances where power over another and solidarity between two individuals is called into question. It is most important as we note that the choice of an individual pronoun may be based upon larger, macro-societal ideologies, but may also take into consideration certain variables specific to the speech event itself (i.e. - physical stance, dress, physical markings/items on the body, etc.).

It has been proposed by some that various linguistic alternatives may be tried by any one speaker, though only those alternatives that receive positive feedback from 'society' are those that become focused rather than being diffused (Le Page & Tabouret-Keller, 1985: 181-82). Yet at the same time, certain linguistic items may receive a degree of negative feedback, yet continue to be used as a form of social solidarity (Gal, 1992: 447). As such, we find that linguistic markers will indicate the concept of 'superior vs. inferior', or the notion of 'power', in a way that is understood across the wider linguistic community while at the same time denoting ideas of 'solidarity' between members of a social group.

Subbarao, Agnihotri & Mukherjee (1991: 37) showed that in many Indian languages, a two- or three-level hierarchy of politeness is found in use of second person pronominals. Use of these pronouns requires an appropriate amount of attention being paid to the status of the speaker and interlocutor, with use of the appropriate pronoun defining that status in the interactional situation. Thus use of the proper form in any situation assumes a certain degree of cultural knowledge regarding the interactants. In one analysis of particular religious (and subsequent cultural) differences, it was shown that use of honorific pronouns did mark similar concepts of

solidarity and power, but that cultural differences created subtle changes in which particular pronouns marked those concepts (Karunatilake & Suseendirajah, 1975: 83-84). It is understood, then, that any examination of the use of honorific pronouns must include a particular ethnographic look at the individuals using such pronouns, including any particular speaker stereotypes that exist.

In addition to the consideration of cultural variations based, perhaps, on caste, we must also discuss the use of particular pronouns. Insofar as I understand, there have been no studies of honorific pronouns (beyond the second person) in India. As such, an examination of first and third person referential pronouns must also be considered to offer a more broad discussion of cultural ideologies of honor and politeness.

### 3.2.2. Grammatical markers of politeness

Beyond an examination of pronominal honorifics and forms of address, there are other grammaticalized markers of politeness that may be used in any given speech event. Where a large portion of honorific research focuses upon more macro-societal ideologies that are portrayed through established pronominal semantics, much of the work on politeness involves individual interactional situations, focusing on those tactics that are assumed to be based upon Gricean conversational maxims (Agha, 1994: 282).

Lakoff (1973: 293) was perhaps the first to introduce the linguistic concept of politeness, offering three rules which govern individual action: 1) “Don’t impose”, 2) “Give options, and 3) “Make addressee feel good, be friendly”. While these rules provided a way in which to examine concepts of politeness, they have later been shown to be far too simplistic and culture-specific in

nature, especially as far as universal concepts of politeness are concerned (Agha, 1994: 279-279).

In examining a more broad theory that encompasses potential cultural variations, the work of Brown & Levinson (1987: 10) is perhaps most influential. In any examination of markers of politeness, while the social categories of the individuals in the interaction must be taken into account, the more personalized concept of 'face' is seen more importantly as the motivating factor behind any speech instance. As such, 'face' is defined in a bifurcated way, with 'positive face' denoting the want to have one's own desires wanted by others, and with 'negative face' being the want to be unimpeded by others. In instances of interaction, or potentially 'face-threatening acts' (FTAs), it was proposed that individuals will compute the potential for risk and subsequently employ a number of strategies to avoid that risk if possible.

While the concept of 'face' carries with it important notions in any examination of politeness, the basic premise for Brown & Levinson's computational rule disallows potential cultural variations - which have been shown to pose problems - from the concepts of 'negative and positive face'. The largest problem arises out of the cultural ideology of 'negative and positive face' that assumes a largely universal concept of 'face' that has been proven incorrect of various cultures, in both Asia (Gu, 1990: 237; Matsumoto, 1989: 207) and in Israel (Blum-Kulka 2005: 131). Because the current study wishes to examine instances of politeness in interactional situations in South Asia, it is necessary to use the concept of 'face' in a non-bifurcated way. As such, use of the term 'face' must indicate the wish an individual has to fulfill personal desires as well as the methods used to carry out those desires. Thus any references to 'face' here will

indicate the concept of individual desire and wants, rather than in the dyadic reference of Brown & Levinson.

### 3.2.3. Honorific registers and social stereotypes

As these previously established theories of honorific and politeness usage are examined, it is important to note that there must exist a distinct separation between the notions of politeness and honorific usage. Agha presents three reasons for this separation (Agha, 1994: 288).

Primarily, as may be recalled from the above discussion, the use of a particular honorific form may carry with it different ideas of politeness in different situations. Secondly, while methods for showing politeness are seemingly limitless, the number of honorific forms that may be potentially used is not. Finally, the concept of politeness involves an interaction between only the speaker and audience while an honorific form may show a level of deference to any individual, present or not. Thus, as we examine instances of specific linguistic interaction, the concept of politeness must be used only to indicate interaction between the speaker and the audience, but may carry with it any number of potential ways in which that politeness is shown. Honorific usage, however, allows for a more specific focus of methods for showing particular ideologies of status between interactants and others that may (or may not) be present.

In using a semiotic approach to this discussion of politeness and honorific usage, attention must be paid first to Silverstein (1976: 11; 1979: 193; & 1992: 311). He shows how, in the use of any pragmatic phenomenon (i.e. - an honorific form), that phenomenon must draw its properties from a particular meta-pragmatic framework that systematizes the use of such phenomenon. As such, any indexical sign may potentially either be presupposing or entailing in

nature; an index may assume an individual's prior knowledge of the context of indexical use (presupposing) or it may create or make explicit a cultural context (entailing). Additionally, because there is more to creating a social effect than simple use of words, any instance of honorific use must be examined in light of the cultural identifiers at play in that interaction.

Agha (1994: 289; 2007: 292) further elucidates the idea of using a semiotic approach to examine use of pragmatic phenomena by showing that in any use of the many types of honorific devices - pronouns, titles, nouns, verbs, and addressee/bystander referents - the "manipulation of ... cultural schemes of stratified value... is what is now perceived as a... scheme of *speaker stereotypes*" (Agha 1994: 291, italics from original). That being said, the current discussion of honorific usage and politeness strategies will go to show how use of specific honorific items, and markers of politeness, in any linguistic interaction offers insight into a more broad analysis of culturally salient ideas of speaker stereotypes, specifically cultural notions of status and hierarchy.

### **3.3. Honorifics and politeness in Telugu**

This section will provide a description of specific markers of honorification in Telugu. To begin, pronouns will be shown to include various ideas of politeness, deference, and respect. Various levels of respect will be discussed, showing how their use is indicative of perceived status between individuals. Following this, a brief look into the use of vocative pronouns and honorific suffixes will be offered. Included with this, the use of vocative clitics on verbal formations will be shown to include both polite and impolite forms. Additionally, I will discuss



terms of endearment and specific kinship terminology as it relates to relationships between individuals.

### 3.3.1. Pronouns

#### 3.3.1.1. FIRST-PERSON PRONOUNS

Both nominative and genitive first person pronouns in Telugu are seen in Figure 3.1.

**Figure 3.1. - First Person Pronouns**

	Nominative		Genitive	
	Singular	Plural	Singular	Plural
<b>Inclusive</b>	<i>neenu</i>	<i>manamu</i>	<i>naa</i>	<i>mana</i>
<b>Exclusive</b>		<i>meemu</i>		<i>maa</i>

Use of the singular pronoun to indicate ‘I’ or ‘my’ does not carry any sort of politeness or honorific marker. The first-person plural, however, has inclusive/exclusive distinction that shows a certain degree of ownership (be it actual or potential, literal or metaphorical). When referring to an item that is or may be owned by at least one other individual other than the speaker, use of the genitive *mana/maa* will be used to indicate such potential ownership. As an example, the 1st-person singular, (genitive) pronoun *naa* will be used to refer to an item that is exclusively my own, and may never be owned by another (i.e. - a body part, a thought, etc.), something that is not currently owned by another (i.e. - a book, toothbrush, item of clothing), or something that is explicitly stated as not belonging to anyone else (i.e. - MY car and no one else’s, etc.).

The distinction of ownership becomes particularly salient when a person wishes to indicate a belief that joint ownership of an item may never happen. As an example, if an

employer of high status is speaking to day laborers, he may refer to his personal vehicle as *naa auto* ‘my car’ rather than *maa auto* ‘our (excl.) car’ or even *mana auto* ‘our (incl.) car’. The car is his own, and he never plans on sharing it with the employees or anyone else. This is not to say that the employees may never own their own cars, but that joint ownership of that specific car will never happen. The employer entails through use of the exclusive marker, that he is not at a ‘sharing’ level with the employees, at least insofar as the item in question is concerned.

Speakers may also make use of the plural first person pronouns (both nominative and genitive) to establish some sort of solidarity in relationship to the referent. In this, the referent need not be a physical member of the audience. For example, a woman may refer to her house (she lives with other people that are not present) as *maa illu* ‘our (excl.) house’, indicating that she shares it with someone (or a group of people) though not with the interlocutor. In so doing, she is indicating solidarity with those with whom she shares the house. Possession of an item is not necessary in the use of this genitive marker, as that same woman may speak of a teacher who happens to be teacher to others in the audience by referring to him as *mana maasteru* ‘our (incl.) teacher’.

In a more divisive example of the use of the inclusive/exclusive marker, a Brahmin priest, when speaking to an individual whom he knows to be non-Brahmin, referred to certain funeral rites as *maa karmakaṇḍa* ‘our (excl.) funeral rites’ (Miller, 2011b: 1202\_185107.wav). The performance of Brahmin’s funeral rites is a tradition that is exclusively Brahmin, and more specifically only by those who are immediate family, and as such the non-Brahmin does not, and will not, participate in them. As such, the Brahmin man speaking establishes the distinction between his own ‘in-group’ when referring to the funeral rights as their (excl.) own, *maa*

*karmakaanḍa*. When thinking of a ‘stereotypical’ Brahmin, this distinction between inclusive and exclusivity has been used to mark various items as being unique to their caste, and thus distinct from the caste of anyone else. These items have included specific ritualistic actions, *dharma* or caste duty, responsibilities (social and familial), etc. But in establishing this sort of ownership of the items in using exclusivity markers, Brahmins effectively force solidarity into the situation.

### 3.3.1.2. SECOND-PERSON PRONOUNS

Both nominative and genitive second person pronouns in Telugu are seen in Figure 3.2.

**Figure 3.2. - Second Person Pronouns**

Nominative		Genitive	
Singular	Plural	Singular	Plural
<i>nuwwu (niiwu)</i>	<i>miiru</i>	<i>nii</i>	<i>mii</i>

The 2nd-person singular (nominative) is most often spoken as *nuwwu*. While the written form *niiwu* may be heard in speech, it is understood as a literary form that is indicative of a higher speech style. As such this form will not be considered here. Because of the politeness associated with the use of the plural form, use of the informal singular *nuwwu* is only done in instances where politeness is not necessary, i.e. - speaking to an obvious inferior, to a child, in a derogatory manner to someone, or to an individual who is extremely close in relationship to the speaker (though only if the relationship will not be damaged by speaking to them using the singular). It has been said that women seem more likely to switch to the more impolite use of *nuwwu* between themselves (Suryakumari, 1986: 314), but this claim was not substantiated in my own data. In my observations, I have seen both genders using it with seemingly equal

frequency, though younger generations show more likelihood of using it. It must be noted that it is most frequently used between individuals of the same gender, showing gender-group solidarity. Cross-gender relationships are still, to some degree, culturally taboo, and as such any interaction between genders is more likely to carry a tendency for deference and less solidarity (thus using the plural form *miiru*).

Use of the plural form *miiru* is more polite. In situations where the status of an individual is unknown, if, for example, a Brahmin does not know if she is speaking to another Brahmin or someone of a lower caste, use of the plural will offer a face-protecting form of address. If, however, during the course of conversation an inferior status is established (i.e. - if a person uses a lexical item associated with a lowly profession, if a person makes reference to a potentially status-lowering personal trait or history, or perhaps if the person has physical characteristics such as dress or behavior common of a lower status), the Brahmin may choose to re-establish the newly understood status differential through use of the impolite singular *nuwwwu*. When this has happened, it is apparent that the status of the addressee is obviously lower and the speaker wishes to make that status differential salient. Many non-Brahmins have expressed frustration over this as they feel that their caste is not enough to establish the lower status, though they still agree that the Brahmin caste is highest in terms of hierarchical status.

If a non-Brahmin is speaking to a Brahmin, however, and if that non-Brahmin wishes to show deference to the Brahmin, use of the plural *miiru* allows for such an option. The plural form is used to show deference and respect towards the addressee. In instances where a Brahmin expects, or even demands, respect in this form, non-Brahmins have used the disrespectful form to say, in essence, that they do not afford high status simply based on caste. It is a blatant

breaking of rules of deference, and as such has potential social consequences. Some non-Brahmins will do this purposefully in efforts to protest the status differential between Brahmins and others. If the status of the addressee is higher for reasons other than caste, though, use of the plural *miiru* is the only option. Blatant breaking of this rule will inevitably result in a rupture of respect in the speaking situation (and will likely also result in a reduced status of the speaker in relation to the audience).

### 3.3.1.3. THIRD-PERSON PRONOUNS

Telugu marks four distinct degrees of respect in third person pronominal usage. The following figure shows each of these four degrees.

**Figure 3.3. - Third Personal Pronouns**

Degrees of Politeness	Male		Female		Plural (both genders)
	Proximal	Distal	Proximal	Distal	
1	<i>wiiDu</i>	<i>waaDu</i>	<i>idi</i>	<i>adi</i>	<i>wiiru/waaru</i>
2	<i>itanu</i>	<i>atanu</i>	<i>iime</i>	<i>aame</i>	
3	<i>iiyana</i>	<i>aayana</i>	<i>iiwiDa</i>	<i>aawiDa</i>	
4	<i>wiiru</i>	<i>waaru</i>	<i>wiiru</i>	<i>waaru</i>	

Each degree, beginning with the first, marks a certain degree of formality and politeness in relation to the speaker and audience. The first degree (1) is the most informal form and is also understood to be the least polite. Such speech is most often used in intimate speech (i.e. - speaking of a very good friend of the same gender), about children (i.e. - where respect is not necessary), or non-human beings (i.e. - animals). Younger, school-age individuals are more prone

to use less-polite pronouns such as *this* when referring to others of a similar status. Those of older generations, for whom status and power seem to play a greater role, will use these terms more frequently when referring to obvious inferiors. Use of this degree of politeness in referring to an individual that is not a child or in close relationship to the speaker is a strong marker of status differential (i.e. - about a peon, a day laborer, a degenerate, etc.). Use of these impolite third-person markers are, perhaps, more common in the speech of people who consider themselves to be of an elevated status due to the fact that speech about non-present individuals allows for a certain degree of informality where the threat to face is reduced. Those who wish to be perceived as generous, kind, or more polite, may use honorific forms in the second person (directed speech at the person), though not in the third person (when speaking about a non-present person without their knowing).

When thinking of Brahmins, many non-Brahmins will claim that they will use these first degree forms with more frequency, especially when speaking of a non-present individual. While such a claim has not been proven, it goes to show that many non-Brahmins will see Brahmin speech as lacking in politeness. Many Telugu films will employ these forms when attempting to depict an evil Brahmin who usurps power and exercises authority simply due to his/her caste. However, in actual speech, any individual who sees him or herself as higher being much higher in status than the referent may use this degree. Adults will use them most frequently when speaking of children, and occasionally of household workers or servants.

The second degree forms carry a lack of formality in speech style, though they do show a certain degree of politeness. They may be used when referring to adults that are closer in relationship (i.e. - friends, colleagues of equal status, etc.). Where use of the first degree marker

entails a certain lack of respect towards the referent, use of the second degree marker presupposes a more equal status and solidarity. When this marker is used, the speaker is portraying an idea that the referent is no greater than him/herself. While this form does not degrade or show a perception of contempt, it also does not posit an elevated status or assumed superiority. It will be used, thus, as a marker of solidarity between the speaker and the referent.

Use of this third degree will not be used by Brahmins when speaking of non-Brahmins whom they consider to be of non-equal status. Use of this degree of form is more indicative of solidarity, and thus in order to establish non-familiarity with an individual, they will not use this form. When a Brahmin wishes to establish solidarity with another Brahmin due to their caste, though, they will use this form to indicate their similarity and familiarity based upon their caste.

The third degree is more formal and respectful. Use of this pronoun is most frequent in a speech instance where an individual wishes to portray elevated respect for the referent. It implies a level of politeness and deference that is expected for an individual of obvious higher status. The speaker of this form wishes to show that the referent is superior, either to the speaker or to the audience, and carries a certain degree of power which deserves respect. If a speaker is speaking to obvious inferiors (i.e. - a younger individual, someone with less education, a lower caste status, or someone considered ritualistically 'impure') they may refer to the third person with this elevated respect to indicate a distinction between the audience and the referent.

One feature of these forms is that they are in the third person, meaning that their use may refer to a non-present individual. Non-Brahmins who wish to show a particular hostility towards an individual will use the lower degree forms, showing their (then) portrayal of their inferior status. In person, however, speaking to a Brahmin is still largely problematic and not typically

done. Brahmins, thus, are more likely to use the lower forms when speaking of others due to the historical fact that their caste is highest in the hierarchy, thus affording them that already elevated status level (see §5.4.).

The fourth degree is the most formal and carries the highest degree of respect. Use of this form is most likely isolated to referring to individuals in an extremely elevated state (i.e. - a worshipped or respected holy man, an individual with great authority in either politics, education, or business, or even deity). Use of this form is less common and is typically used in conjunction with an elevated speech style.

Some Brahmins may be spoken of using this term, though only if they are particularly elevated in status, and that status is not in question by the speaker. Non-Brahmins may also be spoken of in this degree, though only if their status is particularly notable, and commonly agreed upon.

### 3.3.2. Politeness and Vocative Markers

#### 3.3.2.1. (IM)POLITE REFERENTIAL SUFFIXES

In referencing any individual, be they present or absent (i.e. - 2nd person or 3rd person), a speaker may use the honorific suffix *-gaaru* to indicate an elevated level of respect for that individual. Typically a student will refer to a teacher, or a laborer to an employer, or a servant to a master, using this suffix. A man, for example, named Rama Rao, would be referred to as *Rama Rao-gaaru*. Just as this honorific suffix may be used with proper names, it may also be used with titles (i.e. - ‘teacher’ *maasteru-gaaru*, ‘priest’ *sastri-gaaru*, or ‘doctor’ *doctoru-gaaru*), and with



kinship terms (i.e. - ‘father’ *nanna-gaaru*, ‘grandfather’ *taata-gaaru*, or ‘mother’ *amma-gaaru*).

Use of this suffix is not limited to one gender.

Individuals, when speaking to or about a priest, will typically use this honorific suffix to accentuate their subordinate status to the priest. This is not to say that the priest is particularly honorable, but that their status as a temple priest afford them a particular degree of respect due to their position as liaison between the devotee and deity. Being a Brahmin, however, does not afford any individual the status of receiving this suffix. It is to be earned through actions, and while many Brahmins will work in occupations that afford them this degree of respect, not all Brahmins do so. Nevertheless, these occupations of respect, such as temple priest, ritualist, or professor/educator are commonly seen as ‘Brahmin’ professions, thus associating use of this term to Brahmins and their status.

Any individual may also be referred to in a derogatory fashion using the suffix *-du*. Because of the derogatory nature of this suffix it has largely fallen out of use by many of the younger generations. It is still used in certain instances, however, where one wishes to express another’s inferiority. A man named Rama Rao, for example, might be referred to as *Ramu-du*. A Brahmin may use this to note a man’s particular inferiority to himself, or a woman to herself, but use of this term is understood to be disrespectful, and as such constitutes a face-threatening act by the speaker. If this suffix is used, then, it is most certainly by a person of real or assumed higher status in a decidedly derogatory fashion towards the referent.

### 3.3.2.2. VOCATIVE MARKERS

It is said that the ‘Eighth Case’ of Telugu is the Vocative case. This grammatical claim is an obvious borrowing from Sanskrit (Shiffman, 2003: 304), since in reality the use of vocatives is not restricted to verbal or nominal affixes, as would be expected from a grammatical case marker. The most commonly described ‘vocative case’ is seen as a verbal suffix, though vocative pronouns also exist.

### 3.3.2.3. VOCATIVE PRONOUNS

When referring to another individual, calling them using a vocative, there already exists a certain degree of impoliteness. It can be said that use of a vocative pronoun is to place an individual in a position that is of lower status or less respect. When referring to a male, the vocative form is *oreey*. When referring to a female, the vocative is *oseey*. These terms are most frequently used by adults when speaking to young children. When they are used to invoke an adult that is younger than the speaker, it shows a large amount of disrespect and lack of politeness.

These pronouns are most frequently used by Brahmins. While others may use them, most individuals interviewed agreed that only Brahmins will use these pronouns. Use of the pronouns, in particular, has been noted as strongly indicative not only of the nature of Brahmin speech (impolite) but also of its use to establish superiority over the referent. Non-Brahmins will rarely, if ever, use these pronouns.

Use of the two informal vocative forms may be combined morphologically with the question marker *eemiti*. A boy will hear *eemit-raa* ‘what, boy!?’ and a girl will hear *eemit-amma*

‘what, girl!?’). In this use, it is more of a questioning tone as if to question the action of the individual (i.e. - a child is being rowdy and an adult refers to him, as if to silence him and stop his action). The term for a boy is much less polite than it is for a girl. Such use is typically followed by some sort of teaching moment or reprimand.

#### 3.3.2.4. VOCATIVE SUFFIXES

In addition to vocative pronouns there are two impolite vocative suffixes that attach to verbs and may be used to indicate reference back to the addressee. The examples shown in (3) and (4) are impolite in nature, to be used when respect is not shown. When speaking to a boy (or man when choosing to be overtly impolite and disrespectful), the suffix is *-raa*. When speaking to a girl (or likewise a woman when choosing to be highly disrespectful), the suffix is *-Cee*. The allomorphy of this suffix includes two potential consonants that vary according to the preceding vowel. The rules may be written as such: When the preceding vowel is {+front}, the morpheme is heard as *-yee* [je:]. Similarly when the preceding vowel is {-front}, the morpheme is *-wee* [ve:].

- (2) V{+front}-Cee > Vyee  
 V{-front}-Cee > Vwee

See the following example for specific reference.

(3)	<i>po-raa</i>	<i>po-wee</i>	<i>ceppu-raa</i>	<i>ceppu-wee</i>
	go-MASC.VOC	go-FEM.VOC	speak-MASC.VOC	speak-FEM.VOC
	‘leave boy!’	‘leave girl!’	‘talk boy!’	‘talk girl!’
	 <i>winnu-raa</i>	 <i>winnu-wee</i>	 <i>laa-raa</i>	 <i>laa-yee</i>
	listen-MASC.VOC	listen-FEM.VOC	stand-MASC.VOC	stand-FEM.VOC
	‘listen boy!’	‘listen girl!’	‘stand up boy!’	‘stand up girl!’

For one verb, the verb *ra* (meaning ‘to come’), the masculine suffix will reduce to a simple lengthening of the final vowel. See the following example.

(4)	<i>ra-a</i>	<i>ra-yee</i>
	come-MASC.VOC	come-FEM.VOC
	‘come boy!’	‘come girl!’

Again, it should be noted that use of these vocative forms are most commonly ascribed to Brahmins speech. While my own recordings note that they are used only in times of scolding of children or youngsters, I have no instances of their use by non-Brahmins other than in performative examples where the ‘speech’ of a Brahmin is being imitated.

Just as the above examples show impolite vocative suffixes, a polite suffix may also be used. When the suffix *-anḍi* is used, a certain level of deference is established, showing polite and respectful action towards the addressee regardless of gender. Morphophonology dictates that when the polite suffix is added, both the preceding vowel and the morpheme-initial vowel may change due to vowel harmony (see Krishnamurti & Gwynn, 1985: 302; Sastry, 1994: 119).

(5)	<i>ra-ṇḍi</i>	<i>po-eṇḍi</i>	<i>cepp-aṇḍi</i>	<i>winn-aṇḍi</i>
	come-POL	go-POL	speak-POL	listen-POL
	‘please come’	‘please go’	‘please speak’	‘please listen’

This polite suffix may also be combined with a cliticized form of the question word *eemiti* ‘what’ attaching it as a prefix to create the word *eem-aṇḍi*. Use of this form may be translated as ‘excuse me?’ in the way it is used in English to call an individual’s attention while also showing an appropriate amount of deference.

In order to show agreement or disagreement with the statement of another, these suffixes may also be used. No gender distinction is used in the vocative suffixes here.

(6)	<i>alaga</i>	<i>alag-ee</i>	<i>sare</i>	<i>sare-nee</i>
	ok	ok-VOC	agreed	agreed-VOC
	‘ok’	‘ok, you!’	‘agreed’	‘agreed, you!’
	<i>kaadu</i>	<i>kaadu-raa</i>	<i>kaad-aṇḍi</i>	
	no	no-VOC	no-POL	
	‘no’	‘no, you!’	‘no, thank you’	

It is important to note that Telugu has no explicit lexical item for expressing gratitude (i.e. - ‘thank you’). The way in which appreciation is expressed is through other markers of politeness.

### 3.3.4. Family relations and terms of endearment

Kinship titles are frequently used by individuals that are not related in order to denote a particular feeling of solidarity or intimacy. Within these titles, however, there are various levels

of relationship. It can be said that there exist three degrees of distance in using kinship terms to denote relationship. The first degree of distance is someone considered close enough to be a sibling. The second degree of relational distance is a person who is either of a distinct age difference (one generation older/younger) or who is of the same age but is not as intimate with the individual. The third degree of distance is only for those obviously more than one generation older.

Within the first degree of relational distance, the terms for siblings are used. Any individual may refer to a close friend of relatively similar age using the terms for ‘sister’ or ‘brother,’ defining the age distinction between the individual and the peer. A woman may refer to a female friend who may be slightly older as *akka* ‘elder sister’, or a female friend who is younger as *celli* ‘younger sister’. Similarly a man may refer to a male friend who is older as *nannayya* ‘elder brother’ or a male friend who is younger as *tammudu* ‘younger brother’. Because these terms are indicative of a status in which marriage is not an option, reference across gender using this degree of relational distance is indicative of un-marriageable status. If a man and woman are related more distantly (i.e. - 1st or 2nd cousins) they may call each other ‘brother’ or ‘sister’, though again only if they are not eligible for marriage to each other.

For the second degree of relational distance, terms for parents, aunts, and uncles are used. The term for ‘father’ and ‘mother’, *naanna* and *amma* respectively, may be used by adults when speaking affectionately to children. This is distinguished between reference to an individual’s actual parent by actual use of the title in conjunction with the honorific suffix *-gaaru*. In order to refer to a non-relative who is closer in age to one’s parents, they will refer to them using the English words ‘aunty’ and ‘uncle’. The term ‘aunty’ may also be used to refer to any woman who

is not close enough to be a 'sister' but appears to be married or if she is fat (an assumed result of marriage or domestic life).

In order to show respect to elderly members of the community, as a third degree of relational distance, individuals will call a woman 'grandmother' *ammamma* and a man 'grandfather' *taata*. One kinship term (see §2.4.3.) that is only used by Brahmins, is the term *bamma* meaning 'grandmother'. Whenever this word is used, the individual will be immediately identified as a Brahmin.

Even as recently as 20 years ago, nicknames were not commonly used as they were considered less polite (Sastry, 1994: 43). More recently, however, nicknames have become more popular as markers of politeness are less frequently used by younger generations. The typical structure of a nickname involves a shortening of the given name and loss of the second given name: 'Suri' for *Suryanarayana*, 'Ramu' for *Rama Rao* or *Ramakrishnan*, 'Sailu' for *Sailaja*, etc. Referring to an adult with a nickname is not typical unless within a very intimate setting (i.e. - spoken by kin that are older or by very close, long-time friends of a similar age) or in an instance of strong status differential (i.e. - a master speaking either mockingly or endearingly to a servant, an employer speaking to a menial peon or laborer, etc.). Nicknames may be used by a husband to his wife as a term of endearment, but rarely will be used by a wife to her husband due to its more derogatory nature.

### **3.4. Conclusion**

In conclusion, I have shown in this chapter how various forms of politeness, deference, and honor are used in Telugu. In doing so, it is understood that the power differential between

individuals is constantly under scrutiny, and may be established, reformed, and re-established multiple times in any given linguistic interaction. The establishment of relational status between individuals provides others an opportunity to understand the power and status of an individual as well as the status and power of others in relation to that individual. Certain markers such as vocative clitics (*-raa*), various pronouns (*osee*), and nicknames (*Sailu*) were shown to offer a particular lower status of an individual, while other markers such as high respect pronouns (*wiiru*), polite vocative markers (*-aṇḍi*), and honorific suffixes (*-gaaru*) allow individuals to accord appropriate (or extra-ordinary) respect to others. As such, I have shown that specific use of various grammatical markers allows a speaker to establish him/herself within a structure of status and hierarchy, especially inasmuch as caste is concerned, while also placing the interlocutor and others within that same structure.

While any individual may use these markers to indicate status, power, solidarity, or politeness, it may be evaluated in terms of the status afforded the Brahmin caste. Certain terminology is more likely to be used by Brahmins due to their status (real or assumed) in relation to non-Brahmins. Many non-Brahmins will refer to particular speech where honorifics are lacking as that of a Brahmin, as many seem to believe that non-Brahmin speech is impolite in nature. Within any interactional sequence, the status afforded to a caste may be drawn into question, and as such use of these markers will indicate the individual status of a person (Brahmin) as well as the assumed status of that person's caste. Thus it may be seen that, when given the choice, Brahmins may or may not use these forms to solidify the status of the referent or interlocutor.



## Chapter 4: Aspiration as Indicative of Caste

### 4.1. Introduction

As a part of the examination of various aspects of a Brahmin register, this chapter will focus on one particular phonological element: aspiration. As I discuss the use of aspiration in informal speech in contrast with aspiration as a marker of a high speech style, it will be shown how individuals use aspiration as a marker of emphasis that carries with it unique cultural ideologies. Those ideologies will be explained, showing that aspiration is used as a marker of caste solidarity by Brahmins.

To begin this chapter, I will discuss previous research, highlighting those studies that are of particular benefit to the current study, specifically those that have attempted to outline a phonological outline of the language. I will also look at the various ways in which linguistic variation has been observed in previous studies of Telugu phonology, specifically as studies have noted distinctions between high and low speech styles in their various forms. This distinction will be shown to hint at a caste-specific variety. I will use the phonological inventory presented by Krishnamurti (1957: 179), along with proof of aspiration in use as evidence that aspirated consonants are not contrastive with their unaspirated counterparts in Telugu. As such, it will be shown how the use of aspirated consonants constitutes a pragmatic marker that denotes two unique speech styles, i.e. a formal, high speech style, and an informal, caste-specific style. Finally, use of aspiration in the latter style (Brahmin register) will be shown to index particular cultural ideologies which, in turn, index alignment with the Brahmin caste.

## 4.2. Past descriptions

In the past, various attempts have been made to describe the phonological system of Telugu. These attempts have each brought a unique perspective on the language; highlighting particular aspects and expanding the store of knowledge regarding the phonetics of the language. While each analysis maintains a unique position with regards to detail, purpose, and focus, it is important to note their contribution to the present study. As such, I will begin by examining these past phonetic and phonemic descriptions of Telugu.

### 4.2.1. Style-centric analyses

While descriptions of Telugu phonology had been done prior to 1957, they mostly involved simple descriptions of the writing system of the language as understood by British officers. The most notable work, and perhaps most famous to this day, was done by Brown (1857: ii) in his book, “A Grammar of the Telugu Language”. This descriptive grammar was designed for a British learner of the language, to be used in relation with work performed for the British Raj. Brown offers a brief description of the phonology of the language in accordance to the way it is written, rather than how it is pronounced. He did make short reference to two variations of the language, a higher and lower dialect, stating that “native grammarians” - likely Brahmins as the education required to become a grammarian was still almost exclusively restricted to their caste at the time - decidedly “condemn and reject the colloquial forms, which they consider vulgar” though they likely did not use this ‘higher’ form in natural, informal speech (ibid. 33). The two styles to which he refers are a high style and a broad, seemingly all-encompassing low style. The difference between these styles, he notes, are so distinct that use of

the ‘poetic’ or high style in common speech would render the speaker unintelligible. While this is not to say that there did not exist other dialectal variations of spoken Telugu, Brown does not mention them.

Through historical linguistic analysis, scholars have been able to reconstruct the system of proto-Dravidian consonants. The first documentation of Telugu as a distinct language is dated to 575 AD by inscriptions found from the Cōḍa dynasty. The first literary work in Telugu was during the 11th century AD (Krishnamurti, 2003: 23). The language belongs to the Proto-South Dravidian II family (ibid. 21).

**Figure 4.1 - Proto-Dravidian Consonants (Krishnamurti, 2003: 91)**

	<b>Labial</b>	<b>Dental</b>	<b>Alveolar</b>	<b>Retroflex</b>	<b>Palatal</b>	<b>Velar</b>	<b>Glottal</b>
<b>Stops</b>	p	t	t	ʈ	c	k	
<b>Nasals</b>	m	n		ɳ	ɲ		
<b>Laterals</b>			l	ɭ			
<b>Approximant</b>			ɻ	ɻ̠			
<b>Glides</b>	w				j		h

Note that voicing and aspiration were not phonemic in proto-Dravidian (ibid. 27). The introduction of aspirated consonants in Dravidian languages came only after “extensive borrowing from Sanskrit” (ibid. 53).

In describing modern Telugu as it is (or was) spoken, we find that formal linguistic analysis of the language was, perhaps, non-existent until the work of Krishnamurti (1957: 179). In his analysis, Krishnamurti proposes two unique phonemic inventories: one used by educated speakers of Telugu, and another by uneducated speakers. This educated-uneducated divide is

perhaps the strongest attempt to show a distinction in the way Telugu is used as a spoken language. As such, his work is still used today in most descriptions of the sociolinguistic situation in Andhra Pradesh.

Krishnamurti's outline of the educated speech style is a description of native, educated or middle-class speakers from the Coastal districts<sup>10</sup>. The following table shows the consonantal phonemes of their speech.

**Figure 4.2 - Educated Telugu Consonantal Phonemes (Krishnamurti, 1957: 179)**

	Labial	Dental	Alveolar	Palatal	Retroflex	Velar
<b>Stops</b>	p b p <sup>h</sup> b <sup>h</sup>	t d d <sup>h</sup>			ʈ ɖ ʈ <sup>h</sup> ɖ <sup>h</sup>	k g k <sup>h</sup> g <sup>h</sup>
<b>Fricatives</b>	f		s	ʃ	ʂ	h
<b>Affricates</b>				tʃ dʒ tʃ <sup>h</sup> dʒ <sup>h</sup>		
<b>Nasals</b>	m		n		ɳ	
<b>Trill</b>			r			
<b>Laterals</b>			l		ɭ	
<b>Semi-vowels</b>	w		j			

In contrast with the 'educated' dialect, the phonemic system of uneducated speakers as described by Krishnamurti (1957: 179) eliminates use of all aspirated stops. In his discussion, however, he notes that the use of aspiration varies and is not a consistent feature even in the educated style; its use dependent upon tempo of speech and certain elements of emphasis.

<sup>10</sup> Krishnamurti includes the following in his description of the Coastal districts: East Godavari, West Godavari, Guntur, Krishna, Nellore, Srikakulam, and Visakhapatnam, similar to the Coastal and Kalinga areas as seen in Figure 2.2.

Krishnamurti also describes any instance of the voiceless, dental, aspirated stop [t<sup>h</sup>] as being in free variation with its voiced counterpart [d<sup>h</sup>].

In later work, Krishnamurti made note of the distinction between educated and uneducated styles of speech (1962: 26; Kostic, Mitter & Krishnamurti, 1977: 5). Though he does not specifically define the difference between ‘educated’ and ‘uneducated’, it is implied that ‘educated’ speakers are those who are literate (though degrees of literacy vary). In a more specific description of the speech of the uneducated style, he noted the following differences: uneducated speakers will not contrast between aspirated and unaspirated consonants, will not use the phoneme [h], will simplify consonant clusters, will merge all fricatives into [s], and will not use [f] from loan words but will substitute it with [p]. It is important to note in this more specific analysis that even Krishnamurti recognizes the need for further analysis, stating that his analysis is an over simplification of a much more complex linguistic situation (Kostic, Mitter & Krishnamurti, 1977: 5).

Kelley (1959: 147; 1963: 69) claims consonantal phonemes similar to those proposed by Krishnamurti, with the exception of the presence of aspirated consonants, claiming that they exist only as the phoneme /h/ in combination with stops in consonant clusters (stop + /h/). The problem with this claim is that Kelley only provides a list of consonant phonemes for the language without any explanation as to why he presents aspiration as its own phoneme in contrast with all previous analyses which present aspirated consonants as distinct from the fricative /h/. While it may be argued that the existence of aspiration relies solely upon the existence of a voiceless, glottal fricative /h/ phoneme, lack of evidence in favor of either side of this argument makes the issue problematic at best, though not necessarily a focus of this study.

Beyond the brief (footnoted) discussion of phonemic aspiration, Kelly also makes a sociolinguistic claim in favor of a distinction between two speech styles: educated and uneducated. Specifically he states that the voiceless, glottal fricative phoneme /h/, while present in the phonemic inventory of both speaker styles, is only phonetically realized in the speech of educated speakers. This analysis is important as it highlights a vital aspect of the realization of specific phonemes. While the use of the ‘aspirated’ phoneme is ascribed to educated speakers, its realization in certain words remains an optional item. That is to say that the production of such a consonant only comes after having been taught the orthographic representation of that word. Words in which an aspirated consonant is expected (and written) are pronounced as prescribed by educated speakers while the presence of that phoneme is not necessary, and as such is absent in uneducated speech.

Sjoberg (1962: 270) also makes a distinction between two speech styles, noting that the speech of highly educated individuals in particular retains those phonetic features borrowed much earlier from Sanskrit. Her analysis does not mention caste as being synonymous with higher education, though she does allude to such a connection. In her analysis, she notes the following as being distinct phonemes of formal spoken Telugu<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> The dialect to which she refers is that of the East Godavari region, similar to the Coastal dialect described by Krishnamurti (1957: 179; 1962: 26).

**Figure 4.3 - Phonemes of Formal Spoken Telugu - High Speech Style (Sjoberg 1962: 271)**

	Labial	Dental	Alveolar	Palatal	Retroflex	Velar
<b>Stops</b>	p b p <sup>h</sup> b <sup>h̃</sup>	t d d <sup>h̃</sup>			ʈ ɖ ʈ <sup>h̃</sup> ɖ <sup>h̃</sup>	k g k <sup>h̃</sup> g <sup>h̃</sup>
<b>Fricatives</b>	ɸ f		s z	ʃ	ʂ	h
<b>Affricates</b>			ts dz	tʃ dʒ tʃ <sup>h̃</sup> dʒ <sup>h̃</sup>		
<b>Nasals</b>	m		n		ɳ	
<b>Trill</b>			r			
<b>Laterals</b>			l		ɭ	
<b>Semi-vowels</b>	w		j			

Here a few consonants are added to previous descriptions, including the voiceless labial fricative [ɸ] (a sound used only in English borrowings similar to [f]) and two alveolar affricates [ts] and [dz] (a regional variation of [dʒ] and [tʃ], unique to the Coastal dialect). There is also a similarity in that the voiceless dental aspiration stop [t<sup>h̃</sup>] is absent and referred to only in free variation with its voiced counterpart [d<sup>h̃</sup>]. In describing variation, Sjoberg claims that the ability to use a high style comes only with formal education. The consonants of this high style are seen in Figure 4.3. (Sjoberg, 1962: 275-79). Most notably, however, Sjoberg observes that certain aspirated phonemes may also occur in more informal speech of the low style. Reasoning for their observance of this style is not given, and especially not described in terms of the education gap she so explicitly uses as the reason for such phonetic distinctions. Nevertheless, and perhaps most importantly, it should be noted that Sjoberg's claim of distinction is built upon "somewhat limited data" from only three speakers (ibid. 279) and should not be taken as definitive proof of

such a system in use consistently by any one group of people, much less as evidence for any caste-based linguistic distinctions.

Other works in the past have included Lisker (1963: 4), who offers a brief introduction to the phonemic system that does not vary from Krishnamurti's previously mentioned work. Later, Krishnamurti & Sarma (1968: 42) also provide a rather brief description of Telugu phonetics, adding the alveolar affricates [ts] and [dz] as contrastive with their unaspirated, palatal counterparts (similar in nature to Sjoberg's dialectal variants, 1962: 271). Sambasiva Rao (1969: 6) agrees with the phonemic system proposed by Krishnamurti & Sarma (1968: 42), but describes the distinction between two speech styles as 'literary' and 'colloquial'. Unfortunately this work is unavailable and is only known through other references (Reddy, 1981: 31; Sastry, 1994: 34).

Further phonetic descriptions (Sastry 1972: 13; Sastry & Krishnamurthy 1975: 12) present a similar phonemic system for Telugu as found in Krishnamurti (1957: 179), though without any mention of any kind of sociolinguistic variables, claiming the phonemic system to be that of 'standard' Telugu. Jagannath (1981: 50) makes similar claims, though stating that aspirated and unaspirated consonants vary freely with no proof to defend this claim. With this, his work offers no new information to those interested in the phonetics of Telugu.

Reddy (1981: 31) proposed two phonetic systems, a minimal system used by all speakers of the language, and a maximal system comprised of all possible sounds in the language. This description, while appropriate in accounting for all possible sound utterances, does nothing to show phonemes as they exist within any one particular social group or as specific to any one



dialect of the language. Her minimal system is similar in nature to Krishnamurti (1957: 179) while her maximal system takes all possible phonemes from previously shown systems.

Each of the above analyses of Telugu phonetics and phonology have offered similarities and at the same time certain differences. One of the largest problems from each is creating a distinction between innovations through borrowings and sounds that have become a part of the phonological system. Furthermore, for many the difference between systems resulted from a small, isolated sample size, often with results being offered from the speech of only a few speakers with similar socio-economic backgrounds. As such the differences are likely those of dialectal differences across regions or possibly even idiolectal variations.

#### 4.2.2. Caste as an influencing factor

In the previous section it was seen how various descriptions of the phonetics/phonology of Telugu have varied, often as a result of a too-small sampling pool, or perhaps in some cases a lack of understanding of descriptive sociolinguistic methodology. In most early accounts of phonetic variation a particular emphasis was placed upon the difference in the speech of educated vs. uneducated speakers, suggesting - sometimes in rather masked prose - that the distinction might also carry over to caste distinctions. These brief descriptions of sociolinguistic phonetic variables often make assumptions about speech communities without any other speaker identifiers other than an individual's ability to read.

Perhaps among the first, and likely the most famous, to use an ethnographic approach to examine phonetic variation was Gumperz (1958: 669). In this oft cited study, Gumperz found that the social structure of caste as a system influenced interaction which, in turn, resulted in an

observable phonetic variation. After that foundational study, many other studies of caste-based variation have been conducted, though none have examined Telugu specifically nor have they shed new light on the issue of caste-based social groups and linguistic variation that occurs as a result (Berreman, 1960: 774; Berreman, 1972: 385; Horne, 1964: 1; Mestrie, 1990: 335). As such they are not of particular note for the current discussion. Even still, there are various studies of Telugu that make mention of caste distinctions in language, though they do not include much by way of ethnographic analysis in their research.

While previous work dealing specifically with Telugu has noted certain variation of linguistic variables, particularly phonologically, only a few attempts at descriptive analysis make specific reference to caste in a way that is beneficial and worth noting here. Krishnamurti and others (1957: 179; 1962: 26; Kostic, Mitter & Krishnamurti, 1977: 5) explain only a distinction between higher and lower caste speakers, with occasional reference to the speech of Brahmins. Kelley (1959: 148; 1963: 72) makes mention of caste, though does not mention any caste-specific details. Sjoberg (1962: 277) also mentions caste, though it is only through the name of her informant that a specific caste is identified (as it turns out her chief informant was Brahmin).

The Telugu Akademi dialect bulletins (Radhakrishna, 1969-85) are perhaps the most specific collections of linguistic data for the language. Resulting from 16 years of data collection, these bulletins describe the ways in which specific speakers pronounce words elicited from pre-established word lists. These bulletins provide very good sociolinguistic data, including the speaker's geographic location, education level, occupation, and caste in their descriptions. Because of the detail of such descriptions, these bulletins give the most comprehensive description of caste-based variation to date (including those descriptions that have come after).

Nevertheless, while these studies shed light on the unique variation of speakers of different castes, regions, and educational backgrounds, their description does nothing by way of analysis of natural speech or natural speech situations, nor do they include any sort of informational analysis of the data provided. Thus, while these bulletins provide unique insight into the phonology of the language, and have provided data for other studies, their wide aim and lack of descriptivity make them rather difficult to understand, especially as access to them is rather restricted.

Sastry (1994) offers, perhaps, the most comprehensive analysis of all the above information in addition to further descriptions of social dialectal variation in Telugu. Drawing data in large part from the Bulletins of the Telugu Akademi, in addition to a descriptive analysis of speech from individuals from four different regions of Andhra Pradesh, Sastry is perhaps the first to make a strong distinction between the speech of Telugu Brahmins and non-Brahmins. His work brought the concept of socially driven dialectal variation to light in the language, showing that use of language may vary according to at least one specific caste.

The phonemic system described by Sastry (*ibid.* 40) is similar in nature to those previously established. He outlines the difference between those phonemes native to Telugu and those that are not, as shown above. Furthermore he discusses those sounds that are uncommon among certain social groups, noting those sounds that are more common among Brahmin speakers. Certain parts of his analysis prove quite similar to my own, though my own work occurred prior to any knowledge of Sastry's findings. As such, frequent reference will be made to his work as a comparison, showing the similarities and differences in our findings.

### 4.3. Telugu Phonemic System

While a broad description of the entire phonemic inventory of a particular caste in relation to some other caste would be a beneficial study, the current analysis will only consider the distinction between aspirated and unaspirated consonants as a cultural marker. Though variations have been shown to occur between high and low styles (see the above discussion), or formal and informal registers, or educated and uneducated styles, these variations have more to do with literacy and education, and as such do not carry with them the salient, caste-specific values that are found in aspiration. For this reason, the phonemic description found in Krishnamurti (1957: 179) is adequate for our current analysis. It should be noted, however, that further, more complete descriptive work of the language in use is necessary, though it is not the focus of this current work.

Aspiration, as discussed here, is defined as a short puff or burst of air following a full or partial closure of the vocal apparatus, preceding the voicing of a following vowel (Ladefoged, 2006: 56). While certain amounts of aspiration, or even negative VOT (Voice Onset Time), exist in natural speech of Telugu, aspirated consonants are only those with a minimum length of 50 milliseconds (0.05 seconds) between the release of any full or partial closure (defined here as stops, affricates, fricatives, or nasals) and the voicing of the following vowel. All aspirated consonants described in this chapter, either through explicit or referential examples have been affirmed using this minimum length.

The following table shows the potentially aspirated consonants under examination here.

**Figure 4.4 - Aspirated Consonants of Telugu**

	Labial	Dental/ Alveolar	Palatal	Retroflex	Velar
<b>Stops</b>	p b p <sup>h</sup> b <sup>h</sup>	t d t <sup>h</sup> d <sup>h</sup>		ʈ ɖ ʈ <sup>h</sup> ɖ <sup>h</sup>	k g k <sup>h</sup> g <sup>h</sup>
<b>Affricates</b>			tʃ dʒ tʃ <sup>h</sup> dʒ <sup>h</sup>		
<b>Fricatives</b>		s z s <sup>h</sup> z <sup>h</sup>		ʂ ʂ <sup>h</sup>	

#### 4.4. Phonological Aspiration

Any aspiration of Telugu consonants is a phonetic feature borrowed directly from Sanskrit. No native Telugu words contain aspirated consonants (Krishnamurti, 2003: 48-49), and as such any instance of aspiration in natural speech can be attributed to a few specific reasons. Sastry (1994: 42) specifies three types of aspirated consonants that might be heard in speech:

1. Aspirated consonants that are borrowed from Sanskrit
2. Aspirated consonants that entered the system by some phonetic process
3. Aspirated consonants introduced to add emphasis on a particular word

Before discussion is made concerning the way in which aspiration works in Telugu, it is important to properly define the term *emphasis*. Emphasis, as it is used here and elsewhere throughout this work, is meant to describe any instance where phonetic prominence, either through lengthening, an increase in pitch, or an increase in amplitude, occurs. Instances of emphasis are prosodic within the phrase, creating notable prominence at the word being emphasized, thus highlighting its semantic meaning as salient within the greater pragmatic topic.

Any mention of *emphasis* or *emphatic*, thus, represents this type of semantic prominence being given to the word in question.

In the description seen above by Sastry (ibid. 42), there exists a certain difficulty. In establishing aspiration for emphasis as separate from the other two types of aspiration (i.e. - aspiration in Sanskrit borrowings and aspiration as a result of some other phonetic process) he disallows for emphasis developing in the first two ways. While there may, and certainly do, exist phonetic and lexical reasons behind the presence of an aspirated consonant, it is important to note that aspiration, no matter its source, may occur emphatically. Thus, instead of dividing aspirated consonants into emphatic and non-emphatic groups, I will show that most, if not all instances of aspiration - especially when used in informal (i.e. low style) speech - are used to emphasize certain cultural elements within the communication event. The presence of these emphatic markers will be shown first, followed by a discussion of those cultural elements tied to them.

#### 4.4.1. Aspirated words

Because all instances of orthographically represented aspirated consonants are Sanskrit borrowings (see §4.2.1.), it is understood that every speaker may potentially pronounce a consonant using that aspiration if the ‘proper’ pronunciation is desired. Understanding that a word is orthographically represented with an aspirated consonant does not necessitate literacy, as prior exposure to the word with its aspirated pronunciation may be sufficient. However, literacy may be more relevant in the actual production of the aspirated consonant. While formal, written

Telugu contains both aspirated and unaspirated consonants, they are rarely found in stark contrast with each other as an exact minimal pair. Some examples exist, though, as can be seen here:

(7)	<i>khaṇḍa</i>	<i>kaṇḍa</i>	<i>dhuupa</i>	<i>duupa</i>
	‘section, portion’	‘flesh, muscle’	‘incense’	‘thirst’
	<i>ghaaṭu</i>	<i>gaṭu</i>	<i>gaatha</i>	<i>gaata</i>
	‘potency, strength’	‘bite mark’	‘narrative’	‘ditch for water’
	<i>chandam</i>	<i>candam</i>	<i>jhari</i>	<i>jari</i>
	‘poetic meter’	‘manner, likeness’	‘waterfall’	‘thread for border of a <i>dhoti</i> ’
	<i>ṭhiiku</i>	<i>ṭiiku</i>	<i>bhaawa</i>	<i>baawa</i>
	‘proper, correct’	‘arrogance’	‘affirmative’	‘man’s sister’s husband’

These and other minimal pairs may be used to argue the contrastive nature of aspiration. However, it is important to note that each example of a perfect minimal pair cannot be taken at face value. The semantic meaning of each of these words is one that can sometimes be substituted with a non-borrowing that does not use aspiration.

(8)	<b>Borrowing</b>	<b>Native</b>	<b>Borrowing</b>	<b>Native</b>
	<i>khaṇḍa</i>	<i>wantu</i>	<i>ghaaṭu</i>	<i>baalimi</i>
	‘section, portion’	‘part, portion’	‘potency, strength’	‘strength’
	<i>ṭhiiku</i>	<i>tagina</i>	<i>jhari</i>	<i>olawaatamu</i>
	‘proper, correct’	‘proper’	‘waterfall’	‘waterfall’

While some Sanskrit borrowings have native Telugu synonyms, as shown above, there are many instances where no such synonym may be found, thus necessitating use of the borrowing. Words of this type relate in large part to the realms of education and religion, concepts which only came into use in Telugu through Sanskrit (see §2.4.2.). Examples of these words, where no native Telugu synonym may be found, include the following.

(9)	<i>dhiṣaṇa</i>	<i>buddhi</i>	<i>dhaatuwu</i>	<i>bhaawukuḍu</i>
	‘wisdom’	‘mind, intellect’	‘mineral, element’	‘thinker’
	<i>bhuugooḷaśaastram</i>	<i>śriimukham</i>	<i>waagdhaaṭi</i>	
	‘geography’	‘letter from a guru’	‘eloquence of speech’	

There are certain words that have been borrowed from Sanskrit, and while they historically had a non-aspirated native Telugu homophone, that homophone has fallen out of use for so long that the borrowing has entirely replaced the original.

(10)	<b>Sanskrit &gt; Telugu Use</b>	<b>Antiquated Telugu Homophone</b>
	<i>phalam</i> > <i>palam</i>	<i>palam</i>
	‘fruit’	‘weight of one fortieth of a <i>viss</i> ’
	<i>khaṇḍam</i> > <i>kaṇḍa</i>	<i>kaṇḍa</i>
	‘anything cut off or separated’	‘flesh, muscle’

Additionally, in many cases, borrowings do not form a minimal pair with any other word used with near similar frequency, and as such the distinction of aspiration is no longer necessary.



**(11) Words no longer pronounced with aspirated consonants****Borrowing > Pronounced***bhaaṣa > baasa*

‘language’

*bhaarya > baarya*

‘wife’

*phaṇi > paṇi*

‘hooded snake’

*dhiiruḍu > diiruḍu*

‘hero, brave person’

**Borrowing > Pronounced***bhuumi > buumi*

‘earth’

*bhoojanam > boojanam*

‘food’

*dharmam > darma*

‘duty, virtue, morality, good deeds’

*śatham > saṭam*

‘wicked, perverse’

Thus it can be seen that, while it may be argued that aspirated consonants are contrastive in Telugu, their use in spoken language shows that they are not necessarily so. As such, it may be said that any utterance of aspiration is suprasegmental in nature, to be used as a pragmatic index of cultural value rather than as a phonemically necessary element that marks contrasting segments.

## 4.4.2. Formal speech/High stle

Literate speakers of the language will recognize when a word ought to be aspirated because of its orthographic representation. Literate people from any caste will recognize that certain consonants are aspirated while other are not from orthographic prescriptions. Thus, in more formal instances of speech, those consonants that are spelled with aspiration may be pronounced as such. Words that are spelled with aspirated consonants are found in all types of semantic domains, allowing for aspiration in any type of discourse. The following examples show instances of speeches given in a formal situation in which educated speakers were speaking

to an educated crowd. The caste of the speakers varied, showing that something other than caste played a role in the use of these aspirated consonants.

(12) ... *ante yogyata anedi okasari prathiba nu baṭṭi vedukuntu.*

‘... it is yours because of merit, that is to say luck, simply because you search for it.’<sup>12</sup>

... *mamalni alocinpa cese medaduki meedha petta.*

‘... for us, thinking in order to maintain our intelligence.’<sup>13</sup>

*ṣabhaki namaskaram...*

‘My greetings to this group...’<sup>14</sup>

These instances of aspiration show the formal or high style, spoken by well educated speakers as they use aspiration to establish a qualification for their use of that higher style. Each of these examples was offered at a speech of educators and cultural scholars as a way to honor the release of a book of Telugu poetry. Situations of accolade-giving in India are extremely formal. While each instance may vary, common themes include presentation of gifts, garlands of flowers, with those showing respect touching the feet of the recipient. The formality of the occasion dictates use of a higher style and increased use of honorific forms (see §3.3.). Because of the formality of the occasion, we see that the speeches seen in example (12) are all spoken using this higher style.

Aspiration in these instances does nothing more than show use of a higher style of speech associated with education and literacy. Such a speech style denotes previous meta-linguistic education, showing a knowledge of the proper prescriptive aspects of Telugu. It is important to

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<sup>12</sup> Miller, 2011b: 1025\_191017c.wav

<sup>13</sup> Miller, 2011b: 1025\_191017e.wav

<sup>14</sup> Miller, 2011b: 1025\_191017d.wav

note, however, that such aspiration only proves an ability to use this previously proven, and described, style of Telugu speech (Krishnamurti, 1957: 179).

#### **4.5. Emphatic aspiration**

At other times in which informal speech is used, aspiration will be absent in non-Brahmins (this claim is also confirmed by Sastry, 1994: 43). Brahmins, on the other hand, will use aspiration in informal speech as a way to add a particular emphasis to that word. It is this emphatic use of aspiration that is under examination for the current analysis. Use of this emphatic element highlights, as it were, any given word in question as one of import and to be noted by the audience.

In the following examples, I will show instances where Brahmins, speaking in more informal styles, use aspiration in a selective manner to highlight particular words. Those words that receive aspiration are being emphasized in discourse as an attention marking device and will be underlined to show their position. This emphasis, as defined earlier, works to show that the word in question is one that carries with it a large amount of culturally salient information that will provide an increased amount of underlying information to the audience.

The distinctive nature between the formal and informal styles of speech is particularly noted from the selective nature of aspiration. Selective aspiration is only found in informal speech of Brahmins, while aspiration that is used as dictated orthographically, a more formal speech style may be used by literate speakers of any caste. Sastry (1994: 43) explained that certain consonants were more likely to be aspirated than were others in this first, informal style used by Brahmins. He offers an order of frequency of usage of these aspirated sounds in his own



While other consonants were found in this larger data set, each was found only 1 time, indicating less than 1% of the potential sample. It is for this reason that these consonants are not found on the chart above, though their importance is still recognized. In comparing the two frequency charts, it appears as though changes have occurred since Sastry's data was collected. The most frequent sound [k<sup>h</sup>] is still most frequent, though the previously second most frequent [g<sup>h</sup>] has fallen significantly. The voiceless affricate [tʃ<sup>h</sup>] replaced the voiced stop [d<sup>h</sup>] along with several other changes in ordering. It should be noted that the order above is not meant to replace Sastry's (1994: 43) analysis, but rather to show that it is not well established which sounds (besides, perhaps [k<sup>h</sup>]) are more prone to take suprasegmental aspiration in instances of informal speech. Further, more expansive research is necessary to prove anything else definitively.

One sound in particular, the voiceless fricative [s<sup>h</sup>], should be discussed. Standing at 5% of the sample, this aspirated consonant is unique from all others in that it is a sound that is not orthographically represented in Telugu. Because its presence is not indicative of any contrastive distribution with a similar word, its use must be suprasegmental in nature, being used as an emphatic element. This sound will be further examined in §4.5.2.

As is apparent from these frequency lists, it should be stated that an emphatic element is not necessarily determined by the orthography of that word, but rather by its semantics. More specifically, the semantics of a word determines its ability to be used with emphasis in a larger phrase or series of phrases. While frequency of usage ratios show that certain segments are more likely to be aspirated than are others, the actual use of aspiration as an emphatic element requires much more than that word's phonological form. Furthermore, as will be shown specifically with

non-orthographically represented aspiration, the presence of aspiration is not dependent upon the orthographically prescribed nature of the words. The following sections, thus, will examine these two types of aspiration, namely aspiration that occurs where orthographic prescriptions allow for its use, and aspiration that occurs where orthographic prescriptions do not prescribe its use.

#### 4.5.1. Orthographically represented aspiration

The most prevalent form of aspiration as an emphatic element - i.e. in speech that is informal - is the type of aspiration that follows prescriptive rules of orthography. Those who use these forms must have previous knowledge of the literary form of that word. Such previous knowledge allows for selective use of the aspirated phonemes within that word. Aspiration of this type is selective in nature, similar to the way in which any other emphatic element might operate in that emphasis may only be placed upon words that are desired to be emphasized. Importantly, those items which are aspirated in this context are culturally salient in that, as should be recalled, they are Sanskrit borrowings. Thus, this type of ‘Sanskritized speech’ of an informal register, utilizes the pre-established orthographic form of the word being emphasized. The following examples show instances in which this is the case.

- (13) ... *mana bhagundadam mana mokśamu antaraṇam koosani ante...*  
 ‘Our salvation comes from our own translation of the Bhagavatam’  
 ... *adi paddhati...*<sup>16</sup>  
 ‘That’s the custom’

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<sup>16</sup> Miller, 2011b: 1128\_182335a.wav.

These examples show instances of use of this emphatic aspiration in accordance with orthographic prescriptions. It is important to note, however, that not all orthographically prescribed instances of aspiration take the aspiration; this itself is one distinction between the formal and informal speech styles of Telugu. In these examples, the speech is that of a Brahmin priest discussing certain aspects of ritualistic salvation with a family friend. The woman to whom the priest is speaking is older than him, though only by a few years. This age difference is not relevant in terms of propriety, as the two grew up near each other and she is seen by the priest as more an older sister figure (*akka*, see §3.3.4.). The two words that are aspirated in these examples, *bhagundadam* [b<sup>h</sup>agundadam] and *paddhati* [padd<sup>h</sup>ati] are words associated with the cultural aspects of Vedic ritual. The book being referenced, the *Bhagawatam* [b<sup>h</sup>agavatam], is a tome of Vedic scripture, and the concept of *paddhati* [padd<sup>h</sup>ati], meaning ‘custom’, entails a concept of caste tradition, and more specifically in this instance of its use, the Brahmin tradition.

(14) ... *dhanamku puñyangaa wostundi kuuda*  
 ‘It is improper to use holiness for wealth.’<sup>17</sup>

This example shows the speech of a Brahmin priest describing an idea to his son. The idea of impropriety in using holiness was related as the son brought up a recent television segment in which his father had appeared, describing certain aspects of ritual that he performed in his temple. In making this statement, the father emphasized to his son - note the informality of speech between father and son as this is not a formal lecture - how the holiness that comes through service of deity should not be used in an improper way to unworthily obtain money. His emphasis on the word *dhanamku* [d<sup>h</sup>anamku] or ‘wealth’ goes to highlight an idea that some

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<sup>17</sup> Miller, 2011b: 1207\_184930a.wav.

Brahmins may use their caste status, and the holiness it provides, to unrighteously obtain wealth.

This, the father explains, should not be the reason why he or his son perform rituals.

**(15)** *dirgha sumangali bawa... sumangali bhawa*

‘May you always be virtuous... be virtuous.’<sup>18</sup>

Example **(15)** shows the same Brahmin woman from example **(13)**, describing a blessing that Brahmin priests will offer upon the heads of unmarried women. They say this in a formal way to women, yet in this instance the woman is describing the blessing to the researcher. As she speaks she says the phrase, omitting the aspiration on the final word *bhawa* [b<sup>h</sup>ava]. In doing this, the priest sitting at her side visibly reacts, inviting her to correct her pronunciation, which she does. In this instance it can be seen that the proper aspiration is necessary for the true benefit of the blessing to be received. The priest understands that the aspiration is necessary, and corrects the woman’s improper pronunciation. Thus, in an instance where the power of the word itself is contingent upon its proper pronunciation, aspiration is used emphatically to show that correct, and powerful form. Interestingly, the value of the blessing itself is also contingent upon the speaker, as only a Brahmin may say the phrase in order to bless. According to tradition, if a non-Brahmin were to utter the phrase, it would not carry the same power.

#### 4.5.2. Non-orthographically represented aspiration

In other instances, the use of aspiration as an added emphatic element can be found on consonants that are not orthographically aspirated. In these instances, further proof of the decision to use aspiration as an emphatic element can be seen. These instances are seen when a

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<sup>18</sup> Miller, 2011b: 1128\_182335b.wav.



speaker decidedly emphasizes a particular word through the use of aspiration, bringing with its use cultural ideologies.

(16) *apudu vatini batti cheptaru ani ceppandi*

‘Now, that wise woman spoke and then they spoke.’<sup>19</sup>

In this example the speaker is a Brahmin priest, speaking to a woman (the same two speakers from examples (13) and (15)). In this phrase the priest is describing an event that had happened previously between a few women. The woman specified as the *vatini* (‘wise woman’) is later described as a Brahmin woman interacting with other women of unspecified caste. Interestingly, the priest uses the aspiration on the word *ceptaru* [tʃɛptaru] (pronounced in this instance as *cheptaru*) to describe the speaking of the wise, Brahmin woman. The word used to describe the speaker of the other women, however is not aspirated. This is indicative of the unique status afforded the woman in question by the speaker. In wishing to identify her as being Brahmin, he utilizes the aspiration to describe her particular way of speaking.

(17) *... wenakatanu waadu snanam cesakoni yajñoopawiitham... marcukowaccu...*

‘... and after his bath, he took his sacred thread and... whatever...’<sup>20</sup>

In the preceding example, the word *yajñoopawiitam* is expressed with an aspirated *th* [tʰ]. This word is very specific to the highest three castes, described as the ‘twice-born’ castes. The *yajñoopawiitam* or ‘sacred thread’ is a thread of woven hemp - a single strand for single men and multiple inter-woven strands for married men - that is worn draped over the left shoulder. It symbolizes the elite ‘twice born’ status of these castes and is given in a ritualistic ceremony of

<sup>19</sup> Miller, 2011b: 1202\_185107.wav.

<sup>20</sup> Miller, 2011b: 1202\_185107.wav.

second birth (Carstairs, 1961: 26). In the above reference, the speaker is referring to a man who was cleaning his sacred thread during the ritual bath of the early dawn. The entire process is very ritualistically prescribed, defining each action as well as the prayers to be said during their enaction. To note the informality of speech, the priest uses a throwaway word *marukowaccu*, similar in nature to the English ‘thingamajig’ though it is used here as a verb describing the action being done by the man. What may be seen from this, is that the sacred aspect of being ‘twice born’ is emphasized using this Brahmin register marker of aspiration.

One final instance of aspiration that is of particular interest has to do with the retroflex fricative  $\text{ʃ}$  [ʃ]. It was mentioned previously that Sastry (1994: 43) did not include this fricative in his list of potentially aspirated consonants. The reason for this is that most instances of fricative use - i.e. use of the fricatives  $s$  [s],  $\text{ʃ}$  [ʃ], or  $\text{ʃ}$  [ʃ] - are combined into one common pronunciation, the voiceless, dental fricative [s]. However, in instances of speech that incorporates the Brahmin register, the originally retroflex consonant is frequently (mis)pronounced as an aspirated, voiceless, dental fricative *sh* [s<sup>h</sup>]. In these instances, the use of aspiration as an emphatic marker rather than as a phonetically usefully element is particularly salient.

(18) *mana śanti... mana shanti*  
 ‘Our peace... our peace’<sup>21</sup>

In the above example, a woman speaks of ‘peace’ held by the Brahmin caste, particularly the type of peace that comes from proper obedience to caste ideologies. As she was saying the word *śanti* for peace, she paused to correct herself, proving the strength of the argument that the peace of the Brahmins, that ever-enduring, all-desirable peace that is often associated with

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<sup>21</sup> Miller, 2011b: 1202\_183943.wav.

*mokṣha* or ‘transcendental bliss,’ may only come through obedience to one’s caste prescriptions. The word, as it is written, should be pronounced with a voiceless retroflex fricative ṣ [ʂ], and as such should not be pronounced using either of the forms she uses. Yet, while the distinction between this fricative is not a focus of this study, I should note that use of the fricative *s* [s] is most often understood in place of either ṣ [ʂ] or ś [ʃ]. Yet, as she aspirates the consonant, she places an emphasis on it as a word of importance in the phrase.

(19) ...*swa-* ... *swati nakshatram*...  
 ‘*swa-* *swati nakśatram* [the 15th astrological asterism]’<sup>22</sup>

This last example shows a brief glimpse into a short conversation between a Brahmin priest and a non-Brahmin man who came to consult the priest regarding the appropriate name to give his son. While this interaction is slightly more formal than previous examples as they were consulting an astrological almanac, the man and priest were familiar with each other and were not using customary formalities in speech. The man being addressed, a young father, had come to consult the astrological almanac in order to ascertain the appropriate syllables with which to begin the name of his new-born son. The informality of the priest’s initial response (seen in the example), asking under which asterism the son was born, was not problematic. The priest used aspiration in use of the word *nakśatram* to show that, while he was being informal in his speech, he was still qualified to be consulting the almanac; an action reserved for Brahmin priests.

Thus, as has been shown, the use of aspiration is suprasegmental in nature. While certain consonants are more prone to be aspirated than are others, the semantics of the word itself dictates the existence of aspiration more than does the actual form of the word. Orthographically

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<sup>22</sup> Miller, 2011b: 1202\_183943.wav.

aspirated words will be pronounced as prescribed, while non-orthographically aspirated words will take aspiration on certain consonants more than on others as seen in the frequency charts.

#### **4.6. Aspiration indexing caste**

In previous sections it was shown how aspiration carries with it an emphatic element. What needs to be addressed, then, is which culturally salient ideologies present themselves in that emphatic element. In each instance of aspiration, the purpose of emphasis is something that cannot be overlooked, and as such warrants discussion in this section.

The use of a sign to signify any type of cultural ideology is done, seemingly subconsciously, by people every day in a myriad of different interactions. With Telugu as the example, the sign of aspiration is one that carries a cultural value that, had aspiration not been used, perhaps would not be understood in context of the words being said. In this section it will be argued that the cultural value denoted is a particular stance regarding relationship with the Brahmin way of life. This association or stance taking element will be discussed in terms of cultural assumptions as well as linguistic ideologies that have been well established among native speakers of Telugu.

Sastry (1994: 74) makes the argument that aspiration may be done by anyone, regardless of their social status. This claim could, perhaps, be the strongest claim against the arguments made here such that it warrants full quotation.

“Irrespective of their social background, all speakers make use of aspiration for emphasis whatever the linguistic situation may be, viz., formal or informal. The educational level of the speakers is not relevant, as all speakers, irrespective of their educational status, use

aspiration for making emphasis. It is also observed that prestige is associated with aspiration for educated speakers, although many fail to make use of it correctly.”

In its most overt form, this statement asserts that aspiration is something that all speakers use, regardless of social background or education level, as an emphatic marker. It is important to note, however, that Sastry is not arguing for the particular value of aspiration, i.e. that aspiration does not carry with it the value of caste alignment. Rather, in this argument Sastry claims that anyone, regardless of their background, can use - and perhaps better stated *may* use - aspiration as an emphatic element that carries with it particular meaning. Furthermore, as can be seen in the ultimate sentence of the above quote, it can be stated that there is a certain ‘prestige’ associated with use of aspiration as an emphatic element. Importantly, even Sastry (1994: 43) explains that in informal speech, only Brahmins will use aspirated consonants in any form.

Krishnamurti (1962: 26) associates aspiration with the educated class, and Sjoberg (1962: 269) associated it with a more formal style of speech. Sastry (1994: 74-75) simply states that all speakers may use aspiration as an emphatic element, though declines to elucidate further. Furthermore, as was explained previously, Sastry (ibid. 42) attempted to show that emphatic aspiration was not the only time in which aspiration might be used. As has been explained, however, the use of aspiration is not distinctive in Telugu. Previously it was shown that, while it may be seen as contrastive in particular environments with similar, non-aspirated counterparts, semantic requirements permit pronunciation of these consonants without aspiration without a sacrifice of meaning. As such, and because aspiration is no longer seen as a phonemically contrastive feature, its use is restricted only to those instances in which aspiration carries with it an emphatic element.

The immediate association of caste with aspiration comes for historical reasons. Aspiration continues to be identified as a Sanskritic borrowing. While most speakers of Telugu are not bilingual in Sanskrit, they do come in contact with it on occasion. It is during these moments, where Sanskrit is heard and used, that aspiration becomes a salient phonetic feature for those who are unfamiliar with its use.

Sanskrit was the language of education and continues to be the language of religious ritual (see §2.3.). Most, if not all learning and education, prior to introduction of English-medium schools, was conducted in Sanskrit. Cultural restrictions established by the caste system meant that only those in the highest castes dominated the realm of education (Bairy, 2010: 71-72). Further, the education of the Kshatriya and Vaishya castes was rather restricted in contrast to the higher education of the Brahmins (ibid. 59). As such, those who are most associated with higher education, and its language, are Brahmins. This stigma holds true even today (see §1.2.3. for a more detailed discussion of modern ideas regarding Brahmins and education).

Recall from previous sections that many Sanskrit borrowings in Telugu are words within the semantic domains of education. Use of these words in and of themselves carry with them the idea that the speaker is highly educated, as simple knowledge of, and ability to use such words implies such an education. Since, as has been shown previously, use of aspiration is not contrastive in Telugu, using such an aspirated consonant would carry with it a particular ideology of culture that goes beyond the simple idea of ‘highly educated’. Furthermore, as has also been shown, simple use of the higher register is enough to portray this concept. Thus the question remains to be answered as to what aspiration truly marks in these instances of informal speech.

Just as Sanskrit may be used as the language of education, it is important to recall that religion is not separate from that association. While there may exist a more stark separation between secular and religious learning in modern times (again, see §1.2.3.), historically the connection was practically inseparable. The language of deity is Sanskrit, and as such all communication within the religious realm is to be done in Sanskrit in the form of *mantras* (Vedic hymn) and *slokas* [Sanskritic verse] and other such recitations of Vedic literature. While aspiration is not phonemic in Telugu, it is in Sanskrit. As such, its use in Telugu associates its use with the original language, and particularly the cultural notions associated with use of that language. Because use of Sanskrit is most typically observed in the Hindu temple, spoken by the Brahmin priests, aspiration as a Sanskritic borrowing carries with it that same association, specifically the connection between the language from which it is borrowed (Sanskrit) and the individuals that use such a language (Brahmins).

The idea of a caste-specific marker is further seen in examining the Brahmin caste itself. Belonging to the Brahmin caste does not necessitate that an individual be highly educated. In fact, and especially in more modern times, those Brahmins who are priests at smaller, less famous temples, are often individuals that are not highly educated. Bairy (2010: 58) even mentioned the frequent occasion in which Brahmins that are considered to be ‘less than adequate’ are often those who enter the profession of temple ritualist. Thus it can be assumed that, while aspiration can be associated with a higher education, it is not necessarily the case as uneducated Brahmins may frequently be heard using these aspirated consonants in their performance of temple rituals.

Thus the use of aspiration as an emphatic element carries with it a particular association with the religious aspect of Sanskrit, particularly the use of Sanskrit by Brahmin practitioners of Vedic ritual. The education level of those practitioners is not necessarily an elevated one, as can be observed when one goes to a smaller, less popular temple in which the priest has only sufficient education to perform the rituals necessary for worship in that temple. While many other priests are very well educated, the level of their education becomes irrelevant as the only matter at hand is the ability to successfully perform the rituals needed in the moment.

Because the Brahmin caste is most frequently associated with use of Sanskrit, and because the use of aspiration is also most frequently associated with Sanskrit, it creates a common tie that links the cultural ideologies of the Brahmin caste with the use of aspiration in an emphatic manner. The preceding examples, especially, have shown instances in which Brahmins will use this aspiration to indicate their association with, or qualifications for belonging to the Brahmin caste.

It is undoubtable that there are certain instances of interaction in which the caste of a speaker comes into question. The ability for an individual to use a marker of aspiration allows for an interlocutor to prove caste status as a marker of solidarity between other Brahmins, particularly when communicating with a stranger.

In one particular instance, a young Brahmin woman entered into a temple accompanied by her elder aunt. She wished to speak with the chief priest and addressed him in such a way that indicated similar caste status (see §3.3.2. ). Contrary to caste prescriptions, however, the young woman was not wearing a *boṭṭu*, a traditional ‘third-eye’ placed between the brows as a sign of devotion and religious sentiment. The priest, when addressing her, immediately asked if she were



a Brahmin, to which she replied in the affirmative. The priest then responded by stating that she needed to be wearing a *boṭṭu*, a responsibility she held because of her caste, and that saffron was available on a nearby wall in the temple. The young woman, realizing that she needed to look as a Brahmin in order to behave as one, especially in front of the temple priest, began, at the same time, to change her register of speech, using the occasional aspirated consonant as an emphatic marker on those lexical items that showed her knowledge of traditional Brahmin ritual, emphasizing the need to circumambulate the deity as prescribed (with her hands placed together and the deity on her right) and thus her solidarity with the caste ideologies.

(20) ...*akkaDaloo neena pradhakSinam ceeyalu...*

‘... I will circumambulate over there...’<sup>23</sup>

In so doing, she not only proved her caste through appearance (she went and placed the saffron powder between her eyes before circumambulating, just as the priest as suggested) but also through linguistic performance. In changing her appearance, she began to take on the appearance of a Brahmin woman, but in changing her linguistic register at the same time she began to prove her qualifications to appear as, and behave as a Brahmin in that situation.

#### 4.7. Conclusion

In conclusion, recall that aspiration is not used as a contrastive phonemic element of spoken Telugu. In certain instances, the orthographically prescribed aspiration of words may be used when the more formal, high speech style is used. In other instances of more informal speech, however, only the Brahmin caste will use aspiration as an emphatic marker. In some

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<sup>23</sup> This even took place at the Satyam Narayana Swami Temple in downtown Visakhapatnam on 12/07/11 and is recorded in Miller, 2011b: 1207\_183912.wav.

instances, use of this aspiration shows a particular knowledge of the word being emphasized while at the same time emphatically proving the interlocutor's knowledge of the cultural significance of that word. At other times, use of aspiration may be used to qualify an individual to be acting in a particular way, most notably as seen in the example of the young Brahmin woman interacting with the elderly Brahmin priest in a way only acceptable for an individual of similar caste status.

Thus the use of aspiration in informal speech in Telugu can be seen more like a suprasegmental item than like a phonemically contrastive element necessary for word comprehension. The cultural identity associated with aspiration in informal speech is an alignment with the Brahmin caste, and subsequently the traditional Brahmin way of life. While in the moment, what is being emphasized is the culturally significant meaning of the particular word that takes aspiration, showing a knowledge of the word itself and cultural action entailed by the word carries the qualification with it, proving the solidarity among and alignment with Brahmin values.

## **Chapter 5: Meta-linguistic Awareness of Caste Markers**

### **5.1. Introduction**

In previous chapters we have seen three different ways in which Brahmin caste ideologies may be shown linguistically, particularly as those ideologies relate to status, power, and solidarity. The use of certain lexical borrowings from Sanskrit, when incorporated into speech, bring with them certain connotations that associate the speaker with the rights to use Sanskrit. Honorifics and markers of politeness were shown to create tensions of status and power between and across castes. More specifically, use of vocative markers as well as informal honorifics are used to show caste solidarity or where a desire to show status distinction is implemented. Further, the use of aspiration in informal speech was shown to be a strong marker of a Sanskritized Telugu, indicative of the religious and educational history associated with Brahmins.

The Brahmin register is something that is noticeable. The overtness of the register has its subtleties - perhaps use of phonetic aspiration, honorifics, or a use of Sanskrit borrowings - but what is most important is the observable fact that the register is recognized by both Brahmins and non-Brahmins alike. This is not to say that the features presented here are the only salient features of the Brahmin register, but rather that they play a part in the greater distinction between Brahmin and non-Brahmin register usage. One important aspect of this is the fact of its saliency. While many people may not be able to overtly state which features of the register are those which are identifiable as uniquely Brahmin (beyond certain lexical items) they are still able to claim that Brahmins have a unique way of speaking. As such, use of meta-linguistic discourse to analyze the cultural implications of such a register use can be very telling. The following chapter,

thus, will examine only a few instances of meta-linguistic discourse to further elucidate the cultural underpinnings of use of the Brahmin register.

As we analyze certain instances of meta-linguistic discourse, it will be shown that a) the Brahmin register is identifiable by both Brahmins and non-Brahmins, b) the Brahmin register points to specific aspects of Brahmin culture in acts of solidarity, and c) use of the Brahmin register can lead non-Brahmins to perpetuate and believe in popular misconceptions of Brahmin culture.

## **5.2. Speech and Caste Association**

The following section will examine various instances of meta-linguistic discourse in which the concept of a Brahmin form of speech is addressed. It will be shown that association with the Brahmin caste is tied to the form of speech being identified here as a Brahmin register.

Brahmins and non-Brahmins alike are consciously aware of the difference between a Brahmin register and a standard informal style. Additionally, Brahmins find themselves in a situation of unique attention as the common enemy of any sort of caste reformation movements (see §1.2.3.). In nearly every case of caste reform, upward caste mobility, or simple denunciation of the ancient system of caste hierarchy, the Brahmin caste is pitted against the rest. As the highest caste in the hierarchy, and as the proponents for the system itself, the Brahmin has become the focus of attention for any, and perhaps all, instances of caste discussion.

While it has been seen that Brahmins may speak in a way that is unique to their caste regardless of education, it is not explicit that the register itself is indicative of caste affiliation. However, it will be shown through examination of various texts that such an affiliation is implicit in use of the register.

The following <sup>24</sup> examines a small portion of an interview with Shankari, a young, married, Brahmin woman, in her mid 30's. She is well educated and currently works as a teacher of the traditional Indian dance style, Kuchipudi. In this excerpt, she claims that individuals identify her caste through her speech..

40 S: Whenever I speak Telugu, Telugu with a stranger, or with some new friends, I go into a new home, they imitate it otherwise, from my language, that I am a Brahmin

41 R: Uh, huh. That's another thing that someone mentioned to me. They said that they are scared to speak like a Brahmin with other people. They say they try to not speak like a Brahmin with other people because they, because the, whoever they are, the people on the street, may look down on them or may, may, may think unkindly towards them. Is this true?

42 S: Who told you that?

43 R: Uh, this woman, the (deleted)'s daughter, um, her name is... (deleted) She said that it's a very sensitive subject and that she tries to not speak, she tries to speak like other people. Whoever she's with, she tries to speak like them.

44 S: Like, it may be... the reason might be, some people don't want to project their caste, what they are belonging to.

45 R: Uh, huh

46 S: There is that thing also, though there are some people, yes, when they are feeling the same thing, one in the building of my mother, he is also a Brahmin, he says the same thing to her. "What's good in a Brahmin? I don't want to get, uh, publicity that I am a Brahmin."

47 R: Uh, huh

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<sup>24</sup> See Appendix A: 'Ascribed Status' for the complete text

48 S: For which, even the same people who answer this, doesn't want to speak like a Brahmin, he always avoids to present his caste.

Shankari begins by explaining that anyone can identify her as a Brahmin by the way she speaks. Her use of the word 'imitate' can be misleading, as it often is associated with some form of mimicry. However she uses it - perhaps erroneously as English is not her native language - most likely as the term 'intimate' or possibly even 'divine' or 'guess'. She is stating here that individuals who do not know her, or anything about her, can assume her caste based on the way in which she speaks. This report is very telling in that caste identity may be explicitly recognizable through speech. This doesn't signify that everyone can identify caste affiliation by speech, and in fact previous research has demonstrated that non-Brahmin castes are not easily identifiable in speech (Miller, 2011a: 79). However, as Shankari explains it, she recognizes that her caste is identifiable by people as she employs the Brahmin register being described here. This is not to say that she, perhaps, does not have additional identity markers of caste (i.e. - clothing, her name, manner of interaction, etc.) but that she identifies her speech as the identifying marker.

Further examination of this text shows that others, perhaps those who do not wish to be associated with their caste, will mask their speech purposefully. The researcher poses the possibility of such an action by introducing a new character, a woman known to the researcher, who decidedly employs a code that does not identify her as a Brahmin. Certainly other markers may be used to create an association with the caste (vegetarianism, distinct worship patterns, etc.) but the woman has decided to obscure her speech so that she can not be identified in that manner.

Shankari reacts to the researcher's claim that there exist Brahmins who do not wish to portray their caste affiliation seemingly with a simple question of fact, 'Who told you that?' (Line 42). However, and it is important to note this, her response brings an interesting mix of emotion. Behind her words, within the pragmatics of the question itself, lies a strong reaction of surprise and, perhaps, subtle anger. This was expressed with a lowering and drawing together of the eyebrows in addition to a more rapid progression of speech. Her intonational pattern indicates that this question was more of a demand, stating in essence, '(Tell me) who told you that!'. Such a reaction could be indicative of the nature of the question itself, expressing her opinion of the topic raised by the researcher, but in continuing the topic at hand, she indicates her opinion over the matter itself.

Shankari's response begs the issue of a moral dilemma: is caste something that one ought to express when possible? When presented with another individual's opinion as to the use of linguistic markers to hide caste affiliation through purposeful linguistic modification, she may react in a number of ways. From a binary perspective she could either think the opinion is good and commendable, or she could denounce such opinions. It is apparent from Shankari's response, however, that such a desire to mask one's caste is something to be despised.

The stark reaction to the opinion is observable even further in the researcher's response to Shankari's request for an identity of the unknown opinion giver. His initial reaction was an attempt to associate the woman with her Brahmin family, stating that she was the daughter of a wealthy, well-known, Brahmin man. Further identification only occurs after a short pause (...) during which the possibility of potential ramifications of such exposition are weighed.

43 R: Uh, this woman, the (deleted)'s daughter, um, her name is... (deleted)...

So strong was Shankari's reaction to this opinion that the researcher continued to hedge, using an increased amount of 3rd person pronouns to distance the opinion from himself, stating that it is the way of thinking of another, and only used when speaking to still other individuals. In using these pronouns the researcher places himself as a non-participant in this mode of thinking.

43 ... she said that it's a very sensitive subject and that she tries to not speak, she tries to speak like other people. Whoever she's with, she tries to speak like them.  
(underlined to draw attention)

The strength of the initial reaction takes the researcher off guard. Nevertheless - and perhaps in an extension of goodwill - Shankari allows for the existence of such an opinion by acknowledging that certain individuals may think such things. She recognizes that there may be legitimate reasons why a Brahmin would wish to hide his/her caste identity. While she does not explain what those reasons are in the moment (see line 54 for her own explanation of possible reasons), she acknowledges that some people, even some familiar to her, claim to avoid 'speak(ing) like a Brahmin' so as to avoid presenting one's caste (line 48). In order to give validity to her recognition of those opinions, she uses a small instance of performative action to show the 'true' opinions of a person who attempts to avoid presenting caste through speech markers.

46 ...he says the same thing to her. 'What's good in a Brahmin? I don't want to get, uh, publicity that I am a Brahmin.'



Shankari acknowledges that certain individuals may be of the opinion that linguistic caste concealment is beneficial. However, by assigning the relationship of this unknown Brahmin as one that is only close geographically - as he simply lives in her mother's apartment building - she also distances her own association with the man and his opinions. More important to this entire analysis, however, is the fact that Shankari, the woman presented by the researcher, and the man later presented by Shankari all are of the opinion that their caste identity - their Brahmin identity - may potentially be perceived through speech. Their attempts to hide or express their caste identity are their own, yet all retain the option of presenting it through use of the Brahmin register.

Shankari later shows how identifiable the Brahmin caste is because of these unique register features, showing that while individuals may speak according to their regional dialect, their caste is still identifiable.

106 S: If they are from here, definitely my language and their language will be the same. My grandma, that is my father's mother, my father is origin from West Godavari, but he was born and brought up there only. But afterwards, for some time and purpose, they got shifted to Visakhapatnam and have settled here. And we were also born here; we were brought up here. But still, even we have the same things, like we have got lot of complaints on West Godavari Brahmin language, we have a lot of complaints on this. At the same time, we also have the Visakhapatnam language also. So, it's not like nobody can't immediately pick up whether I am from West Godavari or whether I am from Visakhapatnam, but commonly they can say that I am a Brahmin. That's why. But when this, the Krishna district, or the Khammam or the Rayalaseema, or the Hyderabad district, they can catch us.

107 R: They can hear a difference?

- 108 S: They can say, they can make the difference.
- 109 R: That's interesting, because it's, even though there is still a difference because of region, any person can still tell that they are Brahmin by the way that they speak. And I wonder, what it is. What is that 'thing' in the language that tells.
- 110 S: How can we recognize it.
- 111 R: Yeah, how do you recognize that? That's what I'm trying to understand. It's so, it's very very interesting.
- 112 S: What you do is, you try to watch a Brahmin as well as a non-Brahmin at two times speaking the language. Then you will make out the difference. Like, I don't know, I don't think Kanha sir is a Brahmin. He's not. But, I could make a difference. The first time I met him, he was a retired Telugu professor. I know that very well. But still, while he was talking, though it was, Telugu was good, enough to listen, but still some words which are habituated for him, which made me to identify that he is not a Brahmin.

As can be seen, Shankari claims that any Telugu speaker, from any region, can identify her caste in addition to her geographic origin. This goes to say that while regional variations occur, the Brahmin register is identifiable as distinctly Brahmin across each of these dialects. While her claim has not been proven, it is interesting to note.

- 106 ...when this, in the Krishna district, or the Khammam or the Rayalaseema, or the Hyderabad district, they can catch us.

This claim, that Brahmins from the Krishna, Khammam, Rayalaseema, or Hyderabad districts, while they speak different dialects of Telugu according to their geographic location (see §2.2.), will still be identifiable as Brahmins no matter where they go or where they are from. The

actual features that allow for such identification may not be explicitly understood by Shankari, but nevertheless she understands that those who speak the register are identifiable by others.

Furthermore, Shankari recognizes that certain individuals may attempt to imitate the Brahmin register, or perhaps may simply speak in a higher register than a more standard population. However, as a member of the in-group, she is also capable of identifying an impostor.

112 ...I don't think Kanha sir is a Brahmin. He's not. But, I could make a difference. The first time I met him, he was a retired Telugu professor. I know that very well. But still, while he was talking, though it was, Telugu was good, enough to listen, but still some words which are habituated for him, which made me to identify that he is not a Brahmin.

Kanha belongs to a lower caste, yet in an interview<sup>25</sup> with him conducted at another time he made claims as to his own ability to speak using the Brahmin register.

6 ...One main thing I can tell is that I am not a Brahmin, but from my childhood I was raised as a Brahmin. All of my friends were Brahmins, around my home. I was brought up as a Brahmin. My mother used to ask me to make friends with Brahmins so I would learn things from them. She also had many Brahmin friends. Because she encouraged me I was able to learn the Brahmin language, and now I can speak the Brahmin language. But people my age cannot speak that way because they didn't learn it when they were young like me. Even their parents didn't tell them to learn the Brahmin language, but my mom taught me to learn their language. My mom encouraged that friendship, to learn the language, but the non-Brahmin people, if they are educated, they speak differently.

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<sup>25</sup> See Appendix C: 'In your question lies the answer' for full text

Kanha's claim to his ability to speak the register comes from a time in which his mother explicitly had him associate with Brahmin children so as to acquire the ability to use their code. He, and his mother, recognize the code and its affiliation with the Brahmin caste, just as does Shankari.

From the above we can see that the potential for caste alignment may come from speaking 'as a Brahmin'. Use of the register itself is optional, as was shown in the display of those characters who decide to avoid portraying caste association by avoiding speaking as a Brahmin would/should speak and in the explicit actions by Kanha to acquire it as a child. Furthermore, the register contains in it a large amount of cultural association. Speaking as a Brahmin necessarily implies affiliation with the Brahmin caste and whatever consequences may come from such an affiliation. Those who view association with the Brahmin caste to be a negative thing are able to 'switch off' their Brahmin register in speech to mask their caste. However, those who find pride in such an association are able to proudly wear that connection as a linguistic badge, of sorts, to be seen by all with whom they come in contact.

### **5.3. Speech as Indicative of Cultural Values**

While use of a unique linguistic register may index certain associations with the Brahmin cultural group, the issue arises as to what such an association entails. As was shown earlier, certain individuals decidedly withhold from using the register in an attempt to hide their caste. What cultural notions, then, come with Brahmin caste alignment? What cultural associations would become implicitly a part of an individual if they were to use the linguistic code associated with Brahmins? The following section will highlight certain aspects of the Brahmin caste that are indexed through use of the Brahmin register. While not all cultural ideologies are highlighted in

any given instance of specific reference, it may be said that some ideologies can be explicitly marked, thus showing that they, and any more non-linguistic values, are observable through use of a particular register.

The following segment of the transcript shows Shankari again, discussing a situation with a friend who, though Brahmin, does not speak using the Brahmin register.

124 S: One of my friends is there. She is a pure Brahmin. She is living in a joint family. She has got, uh, grandmothers, two grandmothers and two grandfathers, but still, if a strange person talks to her, nobody believes that she is a Brahmin.

125 R: Really?

126 S: Even I was stunned! After this many years of the journey, when I am studying and I am able to identify the persons who is, who is. When I met her first, I could not believe the she was a Brahmin! No! Her language is so slang! So... unpolished thing, ok, I thought, “she might not be a Brahmin”. Then later, when I have learned her surname, surnames also indicate a lot of things

127 R: Sastri

128 S: Shastri, Sharma, a lot of names like that, but for surnames, Nemani, Sarasvatira. There are some surnames which we know. So when I have learned her surname, then I asked her, “Are you a Brahmin?” “Yes, I am a Brahmin”, she said. I was stunned, and I told her, “You don't look like a Brahmin in any form! The moment I am standing, listening to your words, nobody can recognize that you are a Brahmin”

129 R: Uh, huh

130 S: And even she was stunned. Anyway she became close to me, so what we had, it means, when I have started developing a relationship with her, when I started pointing out, “No, don't speak this way, don't speak this way. Correct this word, correct this word.”

- 131 R: And you started telling her
- 132 S: I started telling her. Now that you ask, I don't say that my caste is the dated<sup>26</sup> one, other castes are not dated one, but what makes the difference is the way you speak that influences a lot, a lot of impressions which creates on the other person or the other person creates impression on me. "You being a post-graduate, how can you speak like a, an illiterate?"
- 133 R: Ha, ha, ha
- 134 S: So, uh, I made lot of, I found a lot of differences in her. I told her, "What is this you are telling that you are a, that you are from a joint family? And you have got two grandmothers and two grandfathers and you have got three, lot of elders in your house. Then what do you do to not correct your language?", I asked her. "Nobody has corrected you any time? Even from your childhood?" She said, "No! Though they might have corrected me, I haven't listened to what they say. All the time, right from my childhood, lot of, eh, uh attachment and lot of my attachment, though I got attachment from my parents, but still my friends are non-Brahmin friends. Right from the childhood. Not even a single friend I got is a Brahmin friend. No one getting it. Due to which, I used to go so frequently, um, so much that I got that kind of language. Even few times they have scolded me to correct my language, but I haven't listened to them. This is the first time you are pointing me out" She said to me. "Yes I will point you."
- 135 R: (laughs)
- 136 S: Even though she still gets habituated to that language whenever she speaks so slangly, I feel so irritated.
- 137 R: So when she gets around you, does she try to change and speak better?
- 138 S: Yes, yes!

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<sup>26</sup> This idea of a 'dated' caste indicates a more orthodox way of seeing things. Shankari wished to clarify that because she instructed her friend as to the 'proper' way to speak does not indicate that the way of speaking is a more antiquated, historical, and perhaps outdated form. Rather, she wished to emphasize that the way a person speaks says a lot about who they are, and that in order to be seen as a Brahmin, her friend must learn to speak like one.

- 139 R: Does she ever go back to the way she used to speak?
- 140 S: Yes, she does! She does it!
- 141 R: And then you just, correct her?
- 142 S: Yes! “*eemtakka* [what, sister]?” She calls me sister, she is the younger one. There is a lot of friendship between me and she calls me *akka* [elder sister], “*eemtakka?*” she says that. “What is that?” I’m just thinking. I go on scolding her like anything. (laughs) See now, what she is speaking is “*eemitakka*” now she is saying. “*eemitakka, haiperabakka*” like this she speaks now. Like, I don’t think it’s my influence that has got her to do this, but she has improved a lot in her language. And this day, when I see her, has been two years of journey, she truly has a big difference. Because the moment I have taken admission to my post-graduation of Kuchipudi, then she also got admitted, from then we became friends. Today, when I see her language, though she has not changed it fully, but still, well at least when she speaks to me, she will be conscious enough. How to speak and how to talk.

Shankari points out that her friend, the woman who does not speak using the Brahmin register, is everything expected in a Brahmin. She states that her friend is a ‘pure Brahmin’. What is required, though, is a deeper analysis to fully decide what she means by ‘pure Brahmin’. Shankari expounds on her definition of ‘purity’ by claiming that the woman lives in a joint family, meaning one in which at least three generations are present. While a joint family lifestyle is not unique to the Brahmin caste, it is indicative of living an ‘orthodox’ or ‘traditional’ lifestyle. In this particular instance, the woman has both sets of grandparents living in the same home along with her parents and siblings. Traditional homes throughout India follow this norm of joint living, in which the parents work and the rearing of the children is done by the grandparents

(Bairy, 2010: 210). As such, it is expected of the grandparents to teach their grandchildren how to behave properly. In the situation of Brahmin families, this includes instruction on proper forms of speech. Shankari makes the claim that a Brahmin - most especially a woman who is to spend more time at home with the family (see lines 5-26 in Appendix A) - that is brought up in a 'traditional' Brahmin home, ought to speak like a Brahmin. Yet she mentions this woman who does not speak as expected.

Shankari uses her friend as an example to confirm her argument. Her claim is that Brahmins ought to speak a certain way if they wish to be identified as being Brahmins. She has already shown that Brahmins may wish to avoid identifying with their caste and while she does not agree with the morality or correctness of that choice, she acknowledges that certain people feel that way. This situation, however, shows that she also acknowledges that speaking like a Brahmin is something that is explicitly taught and learned. If a child is reared in a home that does not place specific emphasis on the use of the Brahmin code, even if the home is 'traditional,' it does not mean that the child is going to speak like a Brahmin. Rather, Shankari explains that speaking like a Brahmin requires being taught to speak like a Brahmin. This has just as much to do with the language of the parents and family as it has to do with the friends a child chooses. You may note, in line 134 that she mentions, rather emphatically (underlined to show increase in vocal amplitude), that her friend's friends were not Brahmins. This friend likely had two conflicting codes from which to choose. Perhaps she grew up hearing the Brahmin register in use, yet chose not to use it among friends for whom such a register would not carry the same meaning.



Shankari expounds on this concept of instructional learning of the linguistic code stating that the woman should have been corrected by the elders in her home. But, the woman claims, even though such instruction did happen, she decided to ignore it and adopted a mode of speaking more like that of her peer base.

The tradition of linguistic instruction comes from the cultural idea of instruction as a part of caste occupation. Because traditionally the caste system was strongly related to occupation. As such, the Brahmin caste, being the caste of educators and priests, is most commonly associated with the language of educators and priests. Sanskrit is the language of worship; the language of the gods. As such, proper pronunciation of Sanskrit is vital to the success of a priest (see §2.3.). One Brahmin man, a principal at a local Vedic School, taught this principle by explaining that Sanskritic utterances in any form only become meaningful when they are appropriately uttered and pronounced. Need dictates the way in which a *mantra* - for example - is performed, but in the end those being addressed are not the devotees, but rather the gods. It is vital that the gods hear and understand what is being said. As he put it, “the clarity of expression... is important because the power of the *mantra* is found in its clarity.”<sup>27</sup>

As the tradition of clarity is pertinent to the occupation of being a Brahmin, such precision in speech carries over into other methods of communication, particularly in Telugu. As such - and this is one of the most commonly discussed reasons for a unique Brahmin way of speaking - the speech of a Brahmin carries with it the concept of another occupation frequently tied to Brahmins, that of educators.

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<sup>27</sup> Personal communication (not recorded) on 11.25.11 at Simhachalam, Andhra Pradesh

The tie of the Brahmin caste, and their language, to the field of education was articulated in various points during an interview with Manav<sup>28</sup>, a mid-40's (upper-caste, non-Brahmin) professor of anthropology at a local university.

- 44 ...So when it comes to uh... it is a little difficult to say why they speak that kind of Telugu. And why we don't speak that kind of Telugu. And it is also being, they are mostly respected Telugu teachers. We always look upon to be taught Telugu only by a Brahmin teacher, only by a Brahmin teacher...
- 63 When, if you go back, to look at the poets, the, the, writers. All majority, 80% of them are Brahmin. They were the people who were always into this literature; Telugu literature in terms of writing, you know, even these things. So it all spread to other Brahmins who are not into writing. If I am a writer, relatives will be there. Naturally I pass, pass on some words I, I when I talk to them, you also pick up... these words for this new vocabulary. This poetic way, this literary way of saying *slokas* this thing all comes under this way of intermingling, these things. And non-Brahmins, perhaps, are not exposed to these kinds of things, not including their own vocabulary.
- 90 ...Brahmins have high IQ's, Brahmins are excelling in mathematics. Brahmins are good in, Brahmin boys are very good in mathematics. And I will tell you. It's very interesting. You will see only Brahmin girls in vocal singing, dance, (unintel) you see only Brahmin girls. Vocal singing, music, ragas, vocal solos.

The tie that unites the Brahmin caste with the cultural concept of education mindedness, and particular prowess in language as a result, is very important. While many among the modern intelligentsia do not agree that any one caste is born with a naturally higher intelligence, it is true

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<sup>28</sup> See Appendix D for full text

that families in whom there exists a stronger inclination towards education, are more likely to have children equally inclined towards success in education (Lefgren, Lindquist & Sims 2012: 268). Thus it could be stated that this inclination towards caste-determined occupations allows for a perpetuation of this ideology; that Brahmins are more educationally minded, or perhaps more linguistically minded, and speak as they do because of their need to focus on linguistic clarity because of their occupation. Shankari, in her discussion with her Brahmin friend, associates use of the Brahmin register by stating that one who does not use it ‘speaks like an illiterate’ (line 32).

As has been seen in the previous texts, the conscious use of the Brahmin code is one that carries with it a lot of cultural significance. Shankari mentions that the girl, her friend who did not speak like a Brahmin, came from what is considered to be a traditional Brahmin household. This connection between tradition (family life) and speech (Brahmin register) is one that she is able to play out in her discussion. The woman lives in a traditional home; thus, it is expected that she will speak like any other Brahmin from a traditional home. So when Shankari points out that the girl does not speak in the expected way, it is done as a shock, as if to say, ‘You grew up this way, why don’t you act like it?’

These claims allow us to see that use of the Brahmin register is associated with concepts of traditional Brahmin living. At the same time this traditional lifestyle carries with it certain stigmas. These cultural ideologies are offered by Shankari as one potential reason why a Brahmin might wish to hide their caste.

56 S: When compared to reservations<sup>29</sup> everywhere. So that may be also the reason why your friend doesn't want to represent themselves. And, not only that, they might have come across an acquaintance with such people who are Brahmins, or who always tease the Brahmin way of life, or the, the Brahmin culture, whatever they may, which also might have, even some influence on them, because they don't want to project themselves as Brahmins. Whether they want to project or don't project, the fact is fact. It is true. You have to accept it.

As has been said before, Brahmins, as the elite of the caste hierarchy, and even as the instigators of such a system, are inexorably tied to the concept of caste inequality. After independence, and with the system of governmental reservations set in place to advance the causes of castes deemed to be under-represented, those who belong to the upper castes, the OC's (Other Castes) became the new group of excluded individuals. Brahmins in particular were specifically denied education and employment because certain spots were held in reserve for other castes. As such, known association with the Brahmin caste carries with it the difficulty of an apparent lack of representation. This isn't to say that upper castes do not have any sort of representation, nor is it the attempt of this research to make any sort of claims as to the morality of any system of reservations. Rather, the transparency of such a system can be used to show that linguistic affiliation with caste carries with it the disability to obtain these reservations.

Shankari also poses another potential idea for why a Brahmin might wish to hide caste association, dealing with the opinions and views of an individual's associates. If, for example, a Brahmin worked in a position along side several who held strong anti-Brahmin sentiments, it is

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<sup>29</sup> The system of reservations was established by the government of India to reserve positions within institutions of higher education and government employment for people of less-privileged castes. Those castes previously determined to be in need of these reservation slots are called SC (Scheduled Castes), ST (Scheduled Tribes), and OBC (Other Backwards Castes).

apparent that they might attempt to linguistically hide their caste. Oppositely, any linguistic connection with the caste would draw with it those aspects of Brahmin-ness (both negative and positive).

One possible negative aspect of the Brahmin caste identity is the common use of scolding terminology (see §2.4.3.). One of the most frequently cited aspects of Brahmin speech were those terms in which a Brahmin typically scolds another Brahmin. The following portion of the interview with Shankari shows her own knowledge of these terms.

66 S: What you name? So if it's a small girl, has come and she's spoiling something there, *'eemiti adi chestu pani'*  
           what    that work   job  
           'What are you doing?'

67 R: uh huh

68 S: *'Poyee itu nunchi'*  
           go.VOC thus from  
           'Get thus from here!'

69 R: Really?

70 S: 'Go away from here!' We scold them like that.

71 R: Ok

72 S: Even our mothers say the same thing to us. Even though we are grown-ups, we do commit some mistakes. Even though our parents are good, or falling, something else, she will, then you can say, when it comes to her she immediately scolds me like that *'emitee ni cestu pani ni moham manda!*  
           what-VOC you work job your face    burn  
           'What are you doing? May your face burn!'

She, she, she, such kind of, uh, scoldings are very much common in our language, 'ni moham manda' that means... the true translation of that particular word is, 'may your, bu, uh, face burn, get burned!'

73 R: ((lau)) really?

74 S: Yes! He, he, he, but out of fury just comes. Which becomes, uh, a natural thing for us, we don't do it, uh, to harm.

75 R: Hmm. I've heard another one

76 S: *Vedhava!*  
'widow'

77 R: Yes. That was it. That was the one I was going to say.

78 S: Yes, *Vedhava*. Stupidity! That's nothing but 'stupid',

79 R: Uh, huh huh

80 S: The person who commits a stupid thing, they immediately say *vedhava*

Such a knowledge provides a few interesting notions behind the concept of Brahmin identity and use of these scolding terms. The use of these scolding terms is acknowledged as something that is negative and critical. As Shankari states, such harsh words come “out of fury” as “a natural thing” (line 74). Yet another common statement among use of such scolding terms is that they are associated only with Brahmin speech. While other individuals may engage in scolding behavior, the use of these particular scolding terms are exclusively Brahmin. Shankari later states (line 88), “that is mostly used by Brahmins.” Manav (from the same interview shown earlier) shows this view as well.

54 M: Yeah, some... *atla pinjari vedhava*. *Vedhava*, *emitra vedava*, *vedava* is an idiot in the sense of this, not in the pure idiot sense, lower grade of idiot. *Chi vedhava!*

*Pove!* Like, this only you find only in Brahmin. You don't find it, the *vedhava* word, in my understanding, maybe Kanha will give you a different picture. I don't know. What I feel. *Vedhava! Ichi vedhava* (slowly) this, *vedhava!* Is a Brahmin way of saying.

55 R: And what does that mean?

56 M: *Vedhava* means a lower form of idiot, but lower form. Not pure idiot.

57 R: Not very, not as degrading

58 M: As degrading as an idiot.

59 R: It's, it's perhaps slightly better than an idiot.

60 M: Brat, or something, you brat.

61 R: Punk, jerk.

62 M: Punk, jerk, yeah. This *vedhava*, *chi vedhava*, *atla pinchari vedhava*, *emitra nu...* this is a way of Brahmin, Brahmin way of slang, and Brahmin way of using the obscure, these words are for, you know, uh scolding. You don't find these words in non-Brahmin vocabulary. My understanding of why they have, wide vocabularies is perhaps it is all the text reading, text interpretation. Since from ages, professionally they have been with the texts. So naturally they could have invented, discovered, or trans-created these words.

He later claims that he does not know the true meaning of these words, only that they are commonly used by Brahmins.

70 M: So in that process, what is happening, new, new words are coming, but who is creating this? Is it Brahmins creating these new, new vocabulary or new ways of expression? But as far as my knowledge, in 1983, '84 there were some movies. There were some characters in those movies who were Brahmins trying to invent certain way of slang words. *Atla pinchari vedhava* nobody knows what is this

word. So they introduced this, *atla pinchari*, *atla pinchari vedhava* I don't know what is that. Pure Brahminical slang.

In highlighting these slang terms, Manav shows that the Brahmin caste is the group that will use such words. Furthermore, especially as the definitions of such words are understood, it becomes apparent that these scolding terms are used by Brahmins directed at Brahmins. Any other use is considered rude for the recipient, and likely to invoke a caste-related negative retribution. Shankari makes note of this when given a hypothetical situation in which a rickshaw driver, supposedly a non-Brahmin, is scolded using the Brahmin scolding term.

81 R: Would, perhaps I'm walking on the road, and someone, a rickshaw driver almost hits me, and I say "*vedhava*"?

82 S: Hmmm

83 R: to him. Would I say that? If I said that, what would he think of me?

84 S: Definitely he will not accept you. In the early days they used to accept, but now nobody is going to accept it.

85 R: Nobody accepts it?

86 S: Nobody accepts it!

87 R: Uh, huh. Are there other people that would use that word, *vedhava*?

88 S: That is mostly used by Brahmins

As has been seen, there are certain positive and negative cultural ties that are associated with using the Brahmin register. Not only is it true that use of the register identifies with the Brahmin caste, but such identification also aligns the speaker with certain cultural ideals known,



or thought, to be typical of the caste. Specifically such concepts include the ideas of a traditional, multi-generational home structure, a particular affiliation with the traditional Brahminical occupations, a particular prowess in education, and specific methods for scolding others. Such cultural ideologies tie into the concept of caste identity, and come necessarily tied with any use of the Brahmin register.

#### **5.4. Individual Understanding of Caste Identity**

The concept of a cultural code relies heavily upon a cultural interpretation of that code. Variation within language may be said to be binary: it either happens or it does not. Specific variation with a specific cultural meaning, however, is not binary. Every individual interpretation of cultural meaning is based upon a previously determined method for analysis. This method is often the result of previous interactions that have established a set of cultural rules and regulations. As was explained by Geertz (1973: 1-20), the interpretation of each code has an infinite number of possibilities, thus creating a difficult situation for any analysis of culture-specific codes. The question rises, then, as to how one can identify the true meaning of any code without that previously established set of rules and regulations. As it stands, any idiolect is the collection of ways of speaking of an individual. As an individual holds interactive discourse with members of a social group, the meanings of each token begin to take on a socially recognized and identifiable collective meaning. As such, a cultural meaning is something that can be shown to be specific to a social group that shares a similar cultural code (Labov, 1994: 472).

The following discussion will look at the way in which people located outside of a code's intended culturally significant group interpret that code. This analysis will show how culturally

salient values and opinions become transparent in meta-linguistic analysis of codes. Additionally it will be shown that the meaning of a code, in this instance the Brahmin register, is unique to each interpreter and as such can be used to highlight differences between social groups and at the same time identify reasons behind miscommunications across social groups.

As a primary example, we will examine an interview-style interaction with two non-Brahmin women. Both have had encounters with Brahmins in the past, and expressed some sort of knowledge as to the way in which Brahmins speak. Previous agreement had established the situation as one in which the researcher would be asking them to explain how Brahmins spoke, describing the salient linguistic differences that they are aware of.

- 3 R [like, 'cause you were,  
you were saying... things like *sare-nee*  
yes-VOC  
'Yes!'
- 4 C *sare-nee... ill-ee, raa-yee... po-yee... like... tagudisi maḷadutaru...*  
yes-VOC stay-VOC come-VOC go-VOC explaining you speak  
'Yes, stay, come, go... You explain it (to him)...'
- 5 C like, the la[st and they drag, uh
- 6 Prithika [they drag the ... [accent
- 7 R [uh huh<sup>↑</sup> ... they drag it out?<sup>↑</sup>
- 8 P in all the ways... like...
- 9 P *osee bram... baamma itu raa-yee*  
VOC grannie here come-VOC  
'Hey you, grannie, come here!'

10 P *itlu raa-yee vaccitagulade*  
 like this come-VOC come burn  
 ‘Just like this, come here and burn!’

In a previous chapter we discussed the use of status markers such as vocative suffixes and exclamatives. In this short instance, as an example, we see that the woman performing recognizes that an elevated frequency of such vocative markers will portray a status that places the speaker above the hearer. Chaaya only performs four ‘examples’ of Brahmin speech, showing in each instance a use of the vocative marker. This goes to show, from her perspective, that her understanding of the caste dynamics are such that she makes the Brahmin speaker out in an elevated status, one that is over the addressee.

Similarly, Prithika, in her own interpretation of the unique way in which Brahmins speak, claims some sort of prosodic feature of lengthening that is typical of Brahmins. Her speech, however, has nothing to do with prosodic lengthening, but rather is one in which norms of politeness are breached in speech to a fictitious grandmotherly figure. Prithika performs the part of a Brahmin woman who is obviously younger than the addressee - an individual of similar age would not address an elderly woman by the term ‘grannie’. Likewise, if the woman being addressed were only slightly older than Prithika she would likely use a more appropriate term of endearment such as ‘elder sister’ *akka* or more likely the term ‘aunty’, used to show age difference without offense. In use of the term *bamma*, a distinctively Brahmin word, she shows the elderly status of the woman being addressed. Further insult is found in her address in using the exclamative vocative *osee* to call, ‘Hey, you!’. She then addresses her elder, telling her to come using the impolite vocative suffix. Adding insult to injury, she further tells the grandmother

where to go, and what to do, using the distinctively Brahmin insult command *vaccitagulade* to ‘come and burn’, meaning perhaps more appropriately to come out of shame and obey.

Several aspects of this address show the general rude aspect of their interpretation of the Brahmin register. More importantly, however, we see that Prithika is willing to create a situation in which a Brahmin would be rude to an elderly woman. This in itself shows a general perception of status, indicating that the two non-Brahmin women performers are willing to claim that Brahmins believe their caste status to allow a certain aloofness from following more broad cultural norms of politeness to elders. Furthermore, that both are so eager to express such a statement when asked how Brahmins speak immediately shows their general perception of the Brahmin psyche.

It is admittedly the case that the aspects of speech performed in the above instance are true representations, to some degree, of the Brahmin register. Nevertheless, such interactions between a younger Brahmin and an elderly woman would be rare. Rather, and this is key, use of such derogatory language is most frequently associated with elders speaking to their inferiors. An elder, regardless of caste, has every right to speak down to a child or younger person, especially when some sort of misbehavior can be corrected.

This small performative allows for a brief, if introductory, glimpse into the way in which performative speech may be used to show the way one linguistic code may be interpreted by those outside of the social group being mimicked. Both women, through their performatives are making comments about the way in which the Brahmin register is perceived. It may not be the case that such instances have ever, or will ever occur. Rather, the register itself comes into question, showing through this brief instance of performance that non-Brahmin perception of the

register is negative in nature. In making the fictitious Brahmin speak in this way to an elderly woman, Prithika is transposing an identity of malevolence, impolite behavior, and forcefulness. She is claiming, in essence, that Brahmins see their caste status to hold more import than any status afforded to someone by age. The performer acknowledges that such imitations of Brahmin speech could very likely be taken as mockery or a form of joking about the Brahmin caste as a whole. In this acknowledgment both women make attempts to hedge their opinions from their actions by saying she is only showing things as they really are, not as she views them.

- 108 P [I don't do anything to hurt anybody
- 109 P just to make, uh, just for time pass
- 110 R yeah!
- 111 P that's all
- I don't want to hurt anybody ((lau))
- 112 R no, no
- 113 C Yeah! It's not like that (.)
- 114 R no!
- 115 C Actually, eh, no, no<sup>+</sup> I don't know that (.) how a Brahmin perfectly  
speaks  
as in some (.) little bit, little bit
- 116 R uh, huh
- 117 C But I don't know completely (.7) so how they way (.5) she speaks  
(1.3)
- 118 P No, I don't have a perfect knowledge [of the language
- 119 C [exactly I can't say it! (.6)

- 120 P Yeah, no, I want to say that I don't have a perfect, uh, knowledge  
of the language
- 121 R no
- 122 P But I can imitate, actually, what (.) how they speak (.) that's how

In the text, “They speak like that”<sup>30</sup> Prithika offers several instances of imitation of a Brahmin code. This is done in the manner of stylistic performance (Bauman, 1977: 11), as the speaker takes on features of the imagined person. The actual existence of the speaker being imitated in a performance is irrelevant, as the act of performance creates a reality in that instance. It may not be ‘true to character’, and it may be that the ‘character’ is completely invented for the purpose of the performance. What is relevant, however, is that the character portrays features of cultural identity that are not always consistent with the individual acting out the performance. In this case, Prithika is not a Brahmin, and most likely does not carry with her the cultural values of a Brahmin. Nevertheless, in performing the part of a Brahmin, real or fictitious, she is assuming the cultural values she perceives as salient in discourse.

- 69 P I have one aunt ... like, she's not my aunt actually, my  
mother-in-law's friend
- 70 R uh-huh<sup>↑</sup>
- 71 P she's staying ... the place where we having one more house
- 72 R uh-huh
- 73 P so she bring the rent from that house (1.5)

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<sup>30</sup> See Appendix B for full text

74 P *eemite baagunava*<sup>↑</sup> *baabedi*<sup>↑</sup> *baagundaa baabu baagundaa*<sup>↑</sup>  
 what are you good young girl is good boy is good  
 ‘What, dear, are you good? Is *baabu* good, is he good?  
*↑raa-vee eemi*<sup>↑</sup> *↑nuvu*<sup>↑</sup> *akkadiki apudu apudu* *↑nuvu-ee*<sup>↑</sup> *↑idigo*<sup>↑</sup>  
 come-voc what you to there then then you-ques here it is  
 ‘Come here, what are you doing? Here it is.’  
*↑nuvu-ee*<sup>↑</sup> *↑kaadu*<sup>↑</sup> *mi* *↑ammagarini*<sup>↑</sup> *↑tisukuni*<sup>↑</sup> *↑nuvu*<sup>↑</sup>  
 you-ques not your mother.hon take you  
 ‘Why don’t you come see your mother (me). You could take...’  
*↑bus-ekki*<sup>↑</sup> *↑vacceyi*<sup>↑</sup> *↑niiku daari daari tellida* *aunty*<sup>↑</sup>  
 bus-on come you road road know aunty  
 ‘... the bus? You know the way, aunty.’

Prithika, in this instance, begins to personify the Brahmin woman who is a friend of the family. She is, as Prithika declares, her ‘aunt.’ This term of endearment is used for relatives and non-relatives alike if their proximity to the speaker is at least somewhat apparent. Calling the woman her ‘aunty’ places the woman at a distance of one degree of separation from the speaker, a more proximal term like ‘sister’ or ‘mother’ indicating someone who is an immediate friend or family. Rather, by calling her ‘aunt’ Prithika is indicating that she understands who the person is, has had interactions with her before even if the words of the current interaction were never uttered by the woman in question. The woman is married (as indicated by line 92-100) and lives in the area near the apartments owned by Prithika’s in-laws.

In line 74 Prithika begins a fictitious monologue given by the Brahmin woman directed towards Prithika herself. The terms *baagunava* and *baagundaa* are indicative of ‘good’ or

‘wellness’. The Brahmin woman is asking Prithika if she, her husband (‘babu’) are ok. This is a repetitive use of the question, ‘are you good?’ can be seen as an annoyance. Repetitive use of a question like this is done more as a hypothetical question. The fictitious woman likely knows the state of Prithika and her husband. Even if she doesn’t, however, her asking in this manner - and intonation is paramount here, with the pitch indicating drastic lowering of the tone word initially with a drastic rise in tone question finally (similar in nature to ‘upspeak’ in American teenage girls) - the woman is antagonizing with her voice.

It should be remembered that Prithika is performing this action. She is making the Brahmin woman behave as she perceives her to behave. As such, use of the repetition and upspeak can be said to be done in being oblivious of the actual thoughts and emotions of Prithika, but rather to portray her own pretentious attitude of ‘caring’ about her. The Brahmin woman is pretending to care about Prithika, but in reality is just trying to SHOW that she cares. This is exaggerated even more as she uses the reciprocal term *aunty* to show some sort of caring relationship with Prithika, even though Prithika is likely much younger than the woman. Use of this term goes to show that Prithika perceives her own relationship with the woman of the performative to be one with feigned respect, almost in a derogatory way.

Now, with a picture in the minds of her audience, Prithika has opened the stage for her true verbal performance. With no real preface she begins her performance of a stereotypical interaction, which after a short pause (.8) she employs vocative markers and the like to display the assumed Brahmin arrogance.

83     P     *eemiti amma baagunava*<sup>†</sup>  
                   what mother are good  
                   ‘How are you, girl, are you good?’



- 84 C ((lau))
- 85 P †*bhoojanam ceeyyindayi* aunty *aṅṅe*† †*leedu amma*† †*neenu bhoojanam*†  
 food make aunty say not mother I food  
 ‘Can you make me some food, aunty? Don’t deny your mother.’  
 †*aayo*† †*naaku bhoojanam eeyidipudam*† †*peṭṭakku* time *ayipotuna*†  
 EXCL to me food for now suffer time there friend  
 ‘I haven’t had food and now suffer since the time your...’  
 †*unclegari*† †*kada*† †*bhoojanam*† †*kudiceyyiledu neenu*† ((hhh)) †*tellari*  
 uncle.HON not food for make I at dawn  
 ‘... uncle left. I haven’t made any food for myself. I left at dawn and the...’  
 †*gayikannu*† †*bus ipudu vaccendi*† ((hhh))  
 costly bus now I came  
 ‘... bus was expensive and only now I arrived.’
- 86 P *eevandi tisukonu* †*tellari emmi*† †*tisukonu*† *nuuvu kuda* †*coffee*† †*tiffinlu*  
 not very I take at dawn what take you not coffee lunch  
 ‘I haven’t had much since dawn. Haven’t you had coffee and lunch...’  
 †*eemi* †*tagunu*† †*eemitagunu neenu vellipottanu neenu ayo*† *mi*  
 what drink what I drink I come-go I excl your  
 ‘... and something to drink? What have I had? I came here. Oy! Your...’  
 †*attagari* †*alagayi* †*bagunara*† ((hhh))  
 mother-in law mean are good  
 ‘... poor mother-in-law. Are you ok, though?’
- 87 P {*ayo: mi ma:ma*†*garu aite mapatnuntʃə* †*teləsu*† *ma: frɛ:ndu*† *ma:ku*  
*ba:gə par*†*tʃjəmu:*†} ((hhh)) {†*nuvi*† †*endukamara*† †*ravu*† *ni*†*ku*†  
 †*badjatund*†*kadikada*† *nu*† *ra:vala*† †*leda*†} ((hhh)) {*nabaitʃupe*  
 †*tʃuperomami*†}

‘Poor me! I’ve been friends with your father-in-law since we were introduced a long time ago! Why don’t you come visit me? Isn’t your responsibility there just like it is here? Why don’t you come? Why don’t you send your son? Tell him he’s invited!’

88 C ((lau 7.8 sec))

Note the prosodic features (↑ ↓) in the text above. This performance has a lot of dramatic rises and drops in pitch that make it interesting to examine. These prosodic variations are done giving the speech an expression of exaggeration and dramatic interaction with the audience. Yet the near absence of pausing disallows any other speaker to take the floor, to respond, or to interact with the interlocutor. This way of exhibiting superiority over those being addressed, in this case Prithika as she is portraying the interaction, is used to indicate the sense of superiority the woman portrays (either knowingly or unknowingly) over her addressee. Prithika, then, as she performs this interaction with her mother-in-law’s friend, portrays the friend as a woman that is so caught up in her own problems, in the difficulties of her own travel, in the issues that come from such distant travel, that she is not willing to have an actual interaction.

Prithika, in essence, is claiming that this woman, her own version of a ‘typical’ Brahmin, pays no regard to the feelings, emotions, or potential responses of her associates. Rather, her speech indicates that her perception of Brahmins is that they carry with them a sense of superiority and condescension towards others. With her performance, though, we find that certain aspects of her speech do not coincide with the actual Brahmin register. Prithika does not use aspiration in any way, and she used very few lexical borrowings and vocative markers. What she does do, though, is use her own code to indicate a sense of self-centeredness, over-eagerness, and lack of consideration. These concepts are portrayed in her own way, as if they were the

Brahmin register. As can be seen, then, we understand that Prithika's lack of familiarity with the actual Brahmin register only indicates her own caste. She is not Brahmin, and as such is not expected to be able to successfully use the register.

What can be taken from this is the actual interpretation of a particular code. The out-group, or non-Brahmins, hear and interpret the Brahmin code as being self-centered, over-eager, and inconsiderate in nature. Thus, while Prithika employs her own code to portray these ideals, she is in essence making a profound statement as to the actual, non-Brahmin interpretation of the Brahmin register.

## **5.5. Conclusion**

The use of a particular code carries with it particular cultural associations. To those that identify with those associations, use of the code may be used as an act of solidarity and identification. To those that do not identify with the cultural associations, use of the code is more of an indicator of those aspects of the culture with which they do not identify. As such, and as has been seen in this chapter, we can see how use of a Brahmin register allows individuals to identify with a culture, and the subsequent cultural ideologies that come with said association. Similarly, those who do not wish to identify with the culture and its ideologies can consciously decide to restrict use of the code in effort to mask their belonging.

While use of a Brahmin register is a matter of choice, we have been able to see that the choice, itself, is indicative of much more than linguistic choice. The choice to use a specific register is, in its very essence, the choice to align one's identity with the culture that is so necessarily tied to it.

### **Chapter 6: Social Aspects of a Register**

The use of a register can be attributed to any number of reasons. As was shown in the first chapter, registers of all types denote certain individual ideals or stereotypes. As such, use of the Brahmin register is indexical of those cultural ideologies inherent, or assumed to be inherent in the Brahmin caste. While not all Brahmins behave the same, nor do they all have the same traits, these culturally salient ideologies and social stereotypes are very much a part of what constitutes being a Brahmin. Use of the Brahmin register by Brahmins, then, has been shown as a marker of solidarity among the caste and its members. Non-Brahmins, when they hear this register, however, will often interpret this marker of solidarity as an act of conceit or perhaps undeserved status. It is for this reason that some Brahmins choose to avoid using the register in order to avoid the potential conflict it brings. Others, however, proudly use the register as a marker of their caste, acknowledging more ancient traditions of the superiority of their caste, or perhaps acknowledging the good, religious aspects still attributed to the caste. In both instances, however, we find that while individuals may choose which register they use in speaking, the interpretation of that register is specific to the audience in each instance.

This research has shown various examples of uses of the Brahmin register, noting the ways in which lexical items have been borrowed to index a particularly Brahmin notion of Sanskritized speech. I have also shown that various honorifics and markers of politeness exist in Telugu, allowing any speaker to not only index personal traits, but also to address assumed personal traits in others. Use of these markers occurs in any number of situations, but the identification of status often brings to the foreground ideas of caste status and thus the status afforded to individuals.

Aspiration may be used in informal speech to emphasize certain words, noting that the words being emphasized are indexical of cultural ideologies as well as caste-specific traditions. In looking at aspiration, we also noted that it is not distinctive in Telugu, and as such may be understood only as a suprasegmental of emphatic value.

As was shown in the final chapter, the Brahmin register is salient to all speakers of Telugu. This saliency does not mean that each feature discussed here is a particularly salient feature, rather than the cultural ideologies implicit behind usage of these features are presented and observable by all speakers. Non-Brahmins interpret use of the register as a status marker, solidifying in their minds previously conceived notions of Brahmin arrogance ('proving' social and political notions against the caste) while Brahmins interpret the register as an act of submission to the role ascribed them in religious texts. Both interpretations may be correct, creating further difficulties for all involved in use (and interpretation) of the register.

Important to this entire discussion is the use of linguistic features, aspiration, lexical, or morphological in nature to index cultural values of status, solidarity, and deference. This indexicality brings to question the interconnectedness of language and culture and shows different ways in which culture is brought to the foreground through linguistic manipulation. As such, depiction of a caste and its ideals, ideologies, and social stereotypes can be observed through linguistic variation.

It should be noted that further research is necessary. No single description of caste ideologies, caste-specific speech, or even cultural tendencies can hold true as a universal. Furthermore, so little is known about Telugu in particular that any further examination of variation in any form - as a dialect, a register, or otherwise - will be beneficial to improve the

current study's conclusions. In examining caste-specific variation, it should be noted that there are likely further divisions that may be made, separating a particular, caste-specific register/style/dialect into various divisions within that caste. Such research would be extremely beneficial to show that, not only does caste continue to play a role in linguistic variation in India, but that further separations may be made within the caste hierarchy, noting other sociolinguistic variables.

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**Appendix A - 'Ascribed Status'**  
**1027\_161624.wav Transcript (26:07)**

The following transcript is an interview held with a Brahmin dance teacher in Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh, India. Only two people are present, the researcher and the dance teacher, Shankari.

Key: R=Researcher, S = Shankari

*italics* = Telugu

“quote” = Some form of quoted speech

- 1 R: So, we were talking on, when was it. Was it yesterday? No.
- 2 S: Day before.
- 3 R: Day before... monday!
- 4 S: Monday
- 5 R: Monday or Tue, yeah, Monday. And you were telling me that, um, that girls are different than boys
- 6 S: Mmm, hmm
- 7 R: That the girls will, be better about listening to the parents and that the boys will just talk however they want to talk. Could you tell me more about that?
- 8 S: Uhhh, more about that means, in what sense do you want that?
- 9 R: Um, do you have any examples, or, or, I don't know, I was just, I think it's very interesting why, why do the girls, why are the girls better about keeping the, the way of speaking, the correct way of speaking and why do the boys want to change?
- 10 S: It's, why is not a question there. The situation is like this. Uh. Most probably, whatever the different country and whatever may be the community, the girls are more obedient than boys.
- 11 R: Ah, hah
- 12 S: Yes or no?
- 13 R: Yes
- 14 S: Be frank

- 15 R: Very true
- 16 S: It's very true
- 17 R: Very true
- 18 S: Yes, or no? So due to which, somethings, when it comes to the obedience part, boys mostly go outside. And they move with their friends. Mostly.
- 19 R: Uh, huh
- 20 S: By the time that they are growing up, they learn that things... they don't want to stay at home. They always want to be with their peer group or their friend's group, outside, instead of spending much time with the family. Until and unless he doesn't get married and doesn't become a family man, till then, he'll wish and will to spend outside with his friends and peer group in whatever they do.
- 21 R: Ah, huh
- 22 S: But when it comes to a boy or a woman or a lady, though she has friends until then, nowadays we are so much educated, we are, uh, going into many kinds of fields, but still only for the purpose here, we go outside, and when the purpose is finished we return back to home.
- 23 R: Hmmm
- 24 S: We would like to, spend much time with the family. That may be due to love, due to affection, or due to some fear of the parents, fear of the family, that if I stay outside for a long time they will scold us.
- 25 R: Mmm, hmm
- 26 S: Whatever may be the reason. So, uh, this, uh, mentality of a girl and mentality of a boy, that makes a lot of difference, even in their language, the way they speak.
- 27 R: Hmmm. When the boys come home, do they change and speak?
- 28 S: No! They don't change.
- 29 R: They don't change?
- 30 S: They don't change. Because, be it habitude it is a type of language. They have got a lot of influence of outside language than the family oriented language.
- 31 R: Huh, and they don't care to change?
- 32 S: They don't care to change. When you listen at them, except the boys who applied to go into the profession of the Brahmin profession, that is the PRIESTS, or in the, uh, who recite some Vedas, and also, things that fit all that, who enter such kind of professions, then they'll maintain that language. But, language is very much a social product. That language is not there for the... they can't spell each and every mantra. Every mantra should be spelled so clearly that each and every word should be given the right stress.
- 33 R: Mmm, hmm

- 34 S: Which is very necessary. If there isn't, they will be aware of (it), by the time they, uh, they, uh, though they study the... day to day of computer professional or computer whatever it may be, but still if there are insisted or they had to, or, or, they don't encourage them to go into that kind of such profession as a temple priest or something else, then, they will try to keep up their language.
- 35 R: Ahh. And so the priests, will they... will they instruct other Brahmins on the way to speak? Will, will priests do that?
- 36 S: They don't instruct everybody.
- 37 R: They don't instruct? Will the parents do that?
- 38 S: Yes. Only the parents do.
- 39 R: Ok. (conversation goes off topic into something completely irrelevant)
- (6:00)
- 40 S: Whenever I speak Telugu, Telugu with a stranger, or with some new friends, I go into a new home, they imitate it otherwise, from my language, that I am a Brahmin
- 41 R: Uh, huh. That's another thing that someone mentioned to me. They said that they are scared to speak like a Brahmin with other people. They say they try to not speak like a Brahmin with other people because they, because the, whoever they are, the people on the street, may look down on them or may, may, may think unkindly towards them. Is this true?
- 42 S: Who told you that?
- 43 R: Uh, this woman, the Susarla's daughter, um, her name is... (name) She said that it's a very sensitive subject and that she tries to not speak, she tries to speak like other people. Whoever she's with, she tries to speak like them.
- 44 S: Like, it may be... the reason might be, some people don't want to project their caste, what they are belonging to.
- 45 R: Uh, huh
- 46 S: There is that thing also, though there are some people, yes, when they are feeling the same thing, one in the building of my mother, he is also a Brahmin, he says the same thing to her. "What's good in a Brahmin? I don't want to get, uh, publicity that I am a Brahmin."
- 47 R: Uh, huh
- 48 S: For which, even the same people who answer this, doesn't want to speak like a Brahmin, he always avoids to present his caste.
- 49 R: Uh, huh. But is it a bad to represent your caste?
- 50 S: Not at all a bad thing, but the thing is that, see, some things which we can't change, it is not in our hands. Though, for example, don't take it to heart, you are a Christian.

- 51 R: Uh huh
- 52 S: You may like the way of living like a Brahmin, you may like the traditions of a Brahmin, you may adopt it. You may change your way of living, like a Brahmin. You may become 100% vegetarian, you may follow all the rituals, whatever it may be. But, on the whole, what are you?
- 53 R: By birth, I am not.
- 54 S: You are not. You are called as a Christian, whatever form you fill, you have to mention your religion as a Christian. You can't say that "I am following a Brahmin cult, so I am a Brahmin" Can you do that? We can't cheat. We have to accept the truth. That's why women, with the same thing with me, if I accept Christianity, if I change my culture also, uh, sorry, if I change, if I change my religion also, this is the kind, can say that I've gone from Brahmin to Christian, but we don't say that I'm a proper Christian. That's true. Some things cannot be changed. And we SHOULD accept it. Due to which, there may be some other reasons also, they might have, undergone some, uh, difficulties during their childhood or during, uh, some stage in their lives because of their caste. Especially we can take, the Brahmin caste, the upper caste. OC's, (Open Category), we are the OC's, means we are the leading caste, for which we don't have the reservations to get into employment. We have very less opportunities to get an employment.
- 55 R: Uh, huh.
- 56 S: When compared to reservations everywhere. So that may be also the reason why your friend doesn't want to represent themselves. And, not only that, they might have come across an acquaintance with such people who are Brahmins, or who always tease the Brahmin way of life, or the, the Brahmin culture, whatever they may, which also might have, even some influence on them, because they don't want to project themselves as Brahmins. Whether they want to project or don't project, the fact is fact. It is true. You have to accept it.
- 57 R: You can't change it.
- 58 S: You can't change it. Somebody asks you are a Brahmin, "Yes, I am a Brahmin, so what?" But, the way you put it towards them, that counts a lot. It doesn't count whether you are a Brahmin, or a Kshatriya, or Vaishya, or a Christian, or a Muslim, or whatever you may be, how you treat other people as a equal human being, that counts.
- 59 R: Uh, huh. Very true. Very true. It's just a very interesting thing, that, uh, I imagine that there are a lot of worries, you know? Some people are worried about offending others. But they ought to stick to what they are.
- 60 S: Yes! You have to accept it! Even we learned this from, uh, Bible, from our parents, that's what we call ascribed status. Something we cannot change.
- 61 R: So, I'm trying to, um, I'm trying to better understand... I asked someone, I copied the, uh... well, let me show you an example. I copied a small thing from this movie I was telling you about, Adhurs, he says *eemitee!* a lot.

- 62 S: Hmm, yes! We do say that. “*eemitee, eemitraa*”, for, uh, boy, he is a brother, or if he is a son, whether he is younger or elder, whatever it may be, or if it is the relationship of a son, or a niece or, uh, uh, nephew, not niece, they say “*eemitraa*”
- 63 R: *eemitraa*
- 64 S: *eemitraa* like this, and if it is a girl, if it is, uh, a daughter or if it is a sister, whether is elder or younger, and when it is a niece, then we say “*eemitee, eemitadi*” like that “*eemiteela jesu panulu*”
- 65 R: Really?
- 66 S: What you name? So if it's a small girl, has come and she's spoiling something there, “*eemitadi chesipani*”
- 67 R: uh huh
- 68 S: “*Poitaninchi*”
- 69 R: Really?
- 70 S: “Go away from here!” We scold them like that.
- 71 R: Ok
- 72 S: Even our mothers say the same thing to us. Even though we are grown-ups, we do commit some mistakes. Even though our parents are good, or falling, something else, she will, then you can say, when it comes to her she immediately scolds me like that “*emitanichestupani nimohamanda!*” She, she, she, such kind of, uh, scoldings are very much common in our language, “*ni moham manda*” that means... the true translation of that particular word is, 'may your, bu, uh, face burn, get burned!'
- 73 R: ((lau)) really?
- 74 S: Yes! He, he, he, but out of fury just comes. Which becomes, uh, a natural thing for us, we don't do it, uh, to harm.
- 75 R: Hmm. I've heard another one
- 76 S: *Vedhava!*
- 77 R: YES! That was it. That was the one I was going to say.
- 78 S: Yes, *Vedhava*. Supidity! That's nothing but 'stupid',
- 79 R: Uh, huh huh
- 80 S: The person who commits a stupid thing, they immediately say “*vedhava*”
- 81 R: Would, perhaps I'm walking on the road, and someone, a rickshaw driver almost hits me, and I say “*vedhava*”?
- 82 S: Hmmm
- 83 R: to him. Would I say that? If I said that, what would he think of me?

- 84 S: Definitely he will not accept you. In the early days they used to accept, but now nobody is going to accept it.
- 85 R: Nobody accepts it?
- 86 S: Nobody accepts it!
- 87 R: Uh, huh. Are there other people that would use that word, *vedhava*?
- 88 S: That is mostly used by Brahmins
- 89 R: Mostly used by Brahmins. Uh huh. Are there other words like that, or other, like, scolding, or, or, slang words like that that are mostly used by Brahmins?
- 90 S: (long pause) That is the MOST common word which is used among our all of these
- 91 R: Uh huh
- 92 S: “*abai emiti ni vedhavalu*” “What stupid things you are doing! What is this, is this the right thing?” That we also scold, but “*vedhava emi chestunavu vastu*” or “*buthunda*” that means each and every word is given so much stretch, stress, that's we don't feel like we are giving some stress, uh, purposely or something, oh no. It has become a, uh, it has become a habit for us to speak like that. And (pauses) same thing. That's all.
- 93 R: Well yes, in family units a person will learn to speak a certain way
- 94 S: Yes, yes.
- 95 R: It doesn't matter, where they live, where they are, it doesn't matter, in the home they will speak one way and outside of the home they will speak another way. But what I'm finding is very interesting, is that, perhaps in your home, a Brahmin home, you learn to speak one way, and in another Brahmin home where you never interaction, you never talk to each other, you learn to speak the same way. Why do you think that is? Because of the Vedas or...
- 96 S: Hmmm
- 97 R: So, because in America we have very different types of English. You know you have, uh, Australian English, you have London English and you have American English. And in America we have many different types of English, we have California, you have New York, you have Chicago. All speak different English. Same as here. Telugu you have East Godavari, you have Guntur district,
- 98 S: Yes, yes,
- 99 R: you have Hyderabad, you have, um, Rayalaseema, and you have Visakhapatnam, I mean different areas all have different Telugu
- 100 S: Yes, Yes!
- 101 R: But, in Visakhapatnam, you find two families, perhaps this family, that I was telling you about, the Susarla family, have you ever met them?
- 102 S: No

- 103 R: Ok, do you think that they would talk the same way as your family? Just because they are Brahmin?
- 104 S: I can't say that because I don't know where they have originated from. They maybe migrated from Krishna district and settled here.
- 105 R: I think they are from here.
- 106 S: If they are from here, definitely my language and their language will be the same. My grandma, that is my father's mother, my father is origin from West Godavari, but he was born and brought up there only. But afterwards, for some time and purpose, they got shifted to Visakhapatnam and have settled here. And we were also born here; we were brought up here. But still, even we have the same things, like we have got lot of complaints on West Godavari Brahmin language, we have a lot of complaints on this. At the same time, we also have the Visakhapatnam language also. So, it's not like nobody can't immediately pick up whether I am from West Godavari or whether I am from Visakhapatnam, but commonly they can say that I am a Brahmin. That's why. But when this, the Krishna district, or the Khammam or the Rayalaseema, or the Hyderabad district, they can catch us.
- 107 R: They can hear a difference?
- 108 S: They can say, they can make the difference.
- 109 R: That's interesting, because it's, even though there is still a difference because of region, any person can still tell that they are Brahmin by the way that they speak. And I wonder, what it is. What is that 'thing' in the language that tells.
- 110 S: How can we recognize it.
- 111 R: Yeah, how do you recognize that? That's what I'm trying to understand. It's so, it's very very interesting.
- 112 S: What you do is, you try to watch a Brahmin as well as a non-Brahmin at two times speaking the language. Then you will make out the difference. Like, I don't know, I don't think Kanha sir is a Brahmin. He's not. But, I could make a difference. The first time I met him, he was a retired Telugu professor. I know that very well. But still, while he was talking, though it was, Telugu was good, enough to listen, but still some words which are habituated for him, which made me to identify that he is not a Brahmin.
- 113 R: uh huh
- 114 S: Like “*eetamma, vengara*” some words.
- 115 R: What does that mean, “*eetamma*”
- 116 S: *eeta, eeta, eentamma*
- 117 R: *eentamma*
- 118 S: *eentamma* we say “*eentamma*” for which they say “*eeti, eetamma*” or uh,

- 119 R: You said “*vegamma*”?
- 120 S: *veega* means *tondaragara* come fast.
- 121 R: uh huh, oh yeah, you were telling me that
- 122 S: Yeah, I told you, I told you. You will hear some words which, they also automatically, they don't know purposely, but, but it habituated for such kind of words which they use in, um, their language. And the same time, for me also. So there are some words we catch hold of and we identify that by the type of person who comes from a Brahmin family.
- 123 R: Uh, huh
- 124 S: One of my friends is there. She is a pure Brahmin. She is living in a joint family. She has got, uh, grandmothers, two grandmothers and two grandfathers, but still, if a strange person talks to here, nobody believes that she is a Brahmin.
- 125 R: Really?
- 126 S: Even I was stunned! After this many years of the journey, when I am studying and I am able to identify the persons who is, who is. When I met her first, I could not believe the she was a Brahmin! No! Her language is so slang! So... unpolished thing, ok, I thought, “she might not be a Brahmin”. Then later, when I have learned her surname, surnames also indicate a lot of things
- 127 R: Sastri
- 128 S: Shastri, Sharma, a lot of names like that, but for surnames, Nemani, Sarasvatira. There are some surnames which we know. So when I have learned her surname, then I asked her, “Are you a Brahmin?” “Yes, I am a Brahmin”, she said. I was stunned, and I told her, “You don't look like a Brahmin in any form! The moment I am standing, listening to your words, nobody can recognize that you are a Brahmin”
- 129 R: Uh, huh
- 130 S: And even she was stunned. Anyway she became close to me, so what we had, it means, when I have started developing a relationship with her, when I started pointing out, “No, don't speak this way, don't speak this way. Correct this word, correct this word.”
- 131 R: And you started telling her
- 132 S: I started telling her. Now that you ask, I don't say that my caste is the dated one, other castes are not dated one, but what makes the difference is the way you speak that influences a lot, a lot of impressions which creates on the other person or the other person creates impression on me. “You being a post-graduate, how can you speak like a, an illiterate?”
- 133 R: Ha, ha, ha
- 134 S: So, uh, I made lot of, I found a lot of differences in her. I told her, “What is this you are telling that you are a, that you are from a joint family? And you have got two grandmothers and two grandfathers and you have got three, lot of elders in your house.



Then what do you do to not correct your language?”, I asked her. “Nobody has corrected you any time? Even from your childhood?” She said “no! Though they might have corrected me, I haven't listened to what they say. All the time, right from my childhood, lot of, eh, uh attachment and lot of my attachment, though I got attachment from my parents, but still my friends are non-Brahmin friends. Right from the childhood. Not even a single friend I got is a Brahmin friend. No one getting it. Due to which, I used to go so frequently, um, so much that I got that kind of language. Even few times they have scolded me to correct my language, but I haven't listened to them. This is the first time you are pointing me out” She said to me. “Yes I will point you.”

135 R: (laughs)

136 S: Even though she's still gets habituated to that language whenever she speaks so slangly, I feel so irritated.

137 R: So when she gets around you, does she try to change and speak better?

138 S: Yes, yes!

139 R: Does she ever go back to the way she used to speak?

140 S: yes, she does! She does it!

141 R: And then you just, correct her?

142 S: Yes! “*eemtakka?*” She calls me sister, she is the younger one. There is a lot of friendship between me and she calls me *akka*, “*eetakka?*” she says that. “What is that?” I'm just thinking. I go on scolding her like anything. (laughs) See now, what she is speaking is “*eemitakka*” now she is saying. “*eemitakka, haiperabakka*” like this she speaks now. Like, I don't think it's my influence that has got her to do this, but she has improved a lot in her language. And this day, when I see her, has been two years of journey, she truly has a big difference. Because the moment I have taken admission to my post-graduation of Kutchipudi, then she also got admitted, from then we became friends. Today, when I see her language, though she has not changed it fully, but still, well at least when she speaks to me, she will be conscious enough. How to speak and how to talk.

143 R: Do you think it would be possible for me to meet her? Your friend?

144 S: She's not here. She's in Hyderabad. She went to Hyderabad.

145 R: Yeah, 'cuz I would love to see the things that she says and the things that you tell her to correct. That would be a very interesting thing for me to see. But, I think you have your dance class now.



- 7 R [uh huh<sup>↑</sup>... they drag it out?<sup>↑</sup>
- 8 P in all the ways... like...
- 9 P *osee bram... baamma itu raa-yee*  
 voc grannie here come  
 ‘Hey you, grannie, come here!’
- 10 P *itlu raa-yee vaccitagulade*  
 like this come-VOC come and burn  
 ‘Just like this, come here and burn!’
- 11 P so I told you what is the meaning of *tagulade* and all  
 burn.IMP  
 ‘burn!’
- 12 R *tagulade* [it mea...  
 burn.IMP  
 ‘burn!’
- 13 P [*eemiti-<sup>↓</sup>raa<sup>↑</sup> <sup>↓</sup>aarusta<sup>↑</sup>vu<sup>↓</sup> vedhava<sup>↑</sup> <sup>↓</sup>ii saccinava<sup>↑</sup>*  
 what-VOC barking widow this dead person  
 ‘What?! You screaming widow; you idiot!’
- 14 C ((lau 3.7sec))
- 15 R You never told me what, uh, that one word is (.3)  
 What word was that?
- 16 C *tagulade*  
 burn.IMP  
 ‘burn!’
- 17 R *tagulade*  
 burn.IMP  
 ‘burn!’
- 18 P It was not in the dialect, but sometimes [he has
- 19 R [what is, what is it? ...  
 R what does it mean?
- 20 C *tagulade*  
 burn.IMP  
 ‘burn!’
- 21 P it’s come and die here! (1.5)  
 P come and burn [yourself here
- 22 R [oh: yeah, yeah, yeah you taught me that, that’s right

- 23 P so, it, uh, little bit changes from person to person
- 24 R so...
- 25 C they call, *aalagee maḷḷadutaru*  
ok speak  
'Go ahead! Speak it!'
- 26 R and so can you (speaking to Chaaya) (.8)
- 27 C no, my... no, no, no as ... uh, like, I know just *koncum koncum* like...  
little little  
'a little bit'
- C *aalagee* o<sup>↑</sup>see<sup>↓</sup> they cal... o<sup>↑</sup>see<sup>↓</sup>... means irrespecting of...  
ok 2.F.INT 2.F.INT  
'Ok! Hey you!' 'Hey you!'
- C *osee ilu raa-vee... poo-vee*  
2.F.INT here come-VOC go-VOC  
'Hey you! Come here! Go here!'
- 28 P Because the grannies and all ... the people are very, very frank
- 29 R uh <sup>↑</sup>huh<sup>↓</sup>
- 30 P So it's like, in our, in our... uh, custom... we give lots of respect to our grandparents and all, but the Brahmins... the grandchildren and the grandparents... they are very frank
- 31 R uh <sup>↑</sup>huh<sup>↓</sup>
- 32 P they use *raa-vee... eh<sup>↑</sup>* 'hey you, come on!' ... like that  
come-VOC EXCL  
'Hey you! Come here!'
- 33 R uh <sup>↑</sup>huh<sup>↓</sup>
- 34 P without any respect... Brahmins themselves and even the husband and wife relations
- 35 R really?
- 36 P we call *raa-ndi... kurco-ndi* the wife will say like that  
come-POL sit-POL  
'Please, come and sit.'
- 37 P they will, uh, the husband will ask  
*osee ilu raa-vee vaccu annam peṭa-vee*  
2.F.INT here come-VOC coming food keep-VOC  
'Hey you! Come here and bring me food!'
- 38 C ((lau)) (3.0) ((mumbles))

- 39 P that day Krishnayya said something
- 40 R uh<sup>↑</sup>
- 41 P *osee ilu raa-vee vaccu annam peṭa-vee*  
2.F.INT here come-VOC coming food keep.VOC  
'Hey you! Come here and bring me food!'
- P like that... 'Give me food'...
- 42 C [but we never speak like that
- 43 P [in, in normal language my, my husband says like *an.. annam peṭa-vee*  
food keem.VOC  
'Bring (me) food?'
- just, little bit... *eh<sup>↑</sup> o<sup>↑</sup>see<sup>↓</sup> raa-vee vaccu annam peṭa-vee*  
excl 2.f.int come-voc coming food keep.voc  
'Hey you! Come here and bring me food!'
- 44 P so that is, ... difference
- 45 R uh<sup>↑</sup> huh, huh, huh<sup>↓</sup>
- 46 P everything, they'll speak as if they are making fun of others... the outsiders  
those who don't know about them... they'll think that they are making fun  
of others
- 47 R ah, huh, huh, huh
- 48 P all the time, but... the way of talking is like that<sup>↓</sup>
- 50 R what about children ...
- 51 P *eemiti<sup>↑</sup>*  
what  
'Huh?'
- 52 R Brahmin children
- 53 P <sup>↓</sup>*raa-yee alaga itta unavu<sup>↑</sup>    ↓cakala cakala evaru icceru<sup>↑</sup>-<sup>↓</sup>raa<sup>↑</sup>*  
come-VOC what like this you do nicely nicely who give-VOC  
'Come here, boy! What did you make so pretty? Who will you give it to?'
- maa<sup>↓</sup> bamma kuṇḍa-raa ore<sup>↑</sup>*  
our grannie not doing-VOC 2.M.INT  
'Will you not give it to our grandmother?'
- 54 C *...bamma anu vaḷḷu pilustaru kuda<sup>↑</sup>*  
grannie say they call name not do  
'Don't they call (her) *bamma*?'

- manamu maamma anu pilustemu<sup>↑</sup> valļu bamma anu pilustare<sup>↑</sup>*  
 we ‘maamma’ say call name they ‘bamma’ say call name  
 ‘Don’t we call (her) *maamma* but they call (her) *bamma*?’
- 55 C Brahmins call grannies as *bam[ma]*
- 56 R [*bamma*]
- 57 C we call as *maamma... maamma, ammamma*  
 ‘mother’ ‘mother’ ‘maternal grandmother’
- 58 C *nanamma<sup>↓</sup>... nanamma* is ... grandfa...  
 C *emanti nanamma evarunu* grandfather *ekada...*  
 what paternal-grandmother mean where  
 ‘What does *nanamma* mean? Where is it?’  
 C *nanamma* means father’s mother, *ammamma* means mother’s mamma ...  
 C but, uh, in grannies they call *bamma* for anyone... *bamma*
- 59 R For grandmother, both grandmothers?
- 60 C Yeah (2.8)
- 61 R Deveshi<sup>↑</sup> how do Brahmins talk?
- 62 C *ee Rujula elaga maṭṭladedi cepuccu kida<sup>↑</sup>*  
 what Rujula how speak you talk not  
 ‘Can’t you talk like how Rujula speaks?’  
*ni* friend *kada<sup>↑</sup>... close kada<sup>↑</sup> valļu into kuda unaru kada<sup>↑</sup>*  
 your friend not close not go in house with you are not  
 ‘Isn’t she your friend? Aren’t you close? Don’t you go in her house?’
- 63 Deveshi ((mutters in reply))
- 64 P (mutters for her to talk like Rujula)
- 65 D (mumbles that she doesn’t know how to talk like her, and that they aren’t  
 that close of friends) huh, huh (3.5)
- 66 C She was a friend of, uh, a great friend of, uh,
- 67 R yeah, of Rujula
- 68 C yeah
- 69 P I have one aunt ... like, she’s not my aunt actually, my mother-in-  
 law’s friend
- 70 R uh-huh<sup>↑</sup>
- 71 P she’s staying ... the place where we having one more house
- 72 R uh-huh

- 73 P so she bring the rent from that house (1.5)
- 74 P *eemite baagunava<sup>↑</sup> baabedi<sup>↑</sup> baagundaa baabu baagundaa<sup>↑</sup>*  
 what are you good young girl is good boy is good  
 ‘What, dear, are you good? Is *baabu* good, is he good?’  
*↑raa-vee eemi<sup>↑</sup> ↑nuvu<sup>↑</sup> akkadiki apudu apudu ↑nuvu-ee<sup>↑</sup> ↑idigo<sup>↑</sup>*  
 come-voc what you to there then then you-ques here it is  
 ‘Come here, what are you doing? Here it is.’  
*↑nuvu-ee<sup>↑</sup> ↑kaadu<sup>↑</sup> mi ↑ammagarini<sup>↑</sup> ↑tisukuni<sup>↑</sup> ↑nuvu<sup>↑</sup>*  
 you-ques not your mother.hon take you  
 ‘Why don’t you come see your mother (me). You could take...’  
*↑bus-ekki<sup>↑</sup> ↑vacceyi<sup>↑</sup> ↑niiku daari daari tellida aunty<sup>↑</sup>*  
 bus-on come you road road know aunty  
 ‘... the bus? You know the way, aunty.’
- 75 P I don’t know the way, she says (.9) just, eh, get on any bus and ask to get down, uh, near [the, uh like that, the
- 76 C [*Telugu ceppu*  
 Telugu speak  
 ‘Say it in Telugu!’
- 77 P No, I am explaining what I am [actually meaning
- 78 R [oh, yeah, yeah
- 79 C ah, hah, hah, ((hhh))
- 80 R It, uh, it’s [fine, both
- 81 P [she used to come, ... to give the rent ... so she asked me to come there and to collect the rent, so I’m just, I’m telling, telling you HOW she used the words
- (259 seconds)
- 83 P *eemiti amma baagunava<sup>↑</sup>*  
 what mother are good  
 ‘How are you, girl, are you good?’
- 84 C ((lau))
- 85 P *↑bhoojanam ceeyyindayi aunty anṭe<sup>↑</sup> ↑leedu amma<sup>↑</sup> ↑neenu bhoojanam<sup>↑</sup>*  
 food make aunty say not mother I food  
 ‘Can you make me some food, aunty? Don’t deny your mother.’  
*↑aayo<sup>↑</sup> ↑naaku bhoojanam eeyidipudam<sup>↑</sup> ↑peṭṭakku time ayipotuna<sup>↑</sup>*  
 EXCL to me food for now suffer time there friend  
 ‘I haven’t had food and now suffer since the time your...’

<sup>+</sup>unclegari<sup>↑</sup> <sup>+</sup>kada<sup>↑</sup> <sup>+</sup>bhoojanam<sup>↑</sup> <sup>+</sup>kudiceyyiledu neenu<sup>↑</sup> ((hhh)) <sup>+</sup>tellari  
 uncle.HON not food for make I at dawn  
 ‘... uncle left. I haven’t made any food for myself. I left at dawn and the...’  
 gayikannu<sup>↑</sup> <sup>+</sup>bus ipudu vaccendi<sup>↑</sup> ((hhh))  
 costly bus now I came  
 ‘... bus was expensive and only now I arrived.’

(Note: As she is speaking like this her voice gradually gets louder, more increased in pitch variation while increasing overall pitch. She is also increasing the speed of delivery and decreasing pauses between statements. Simultaneously Chaaya is laughing, though quietly, as if waiting for the end of this performance)

86 P *eevandi tisukonu* <sup>+</sup>tellari emmi<sup>↑</sup> <sup>+</sup>tisukonu<sup>↑</sup> nuuvu kuda <sup>+</sup>coffee<sup>↑</sup> tiffinlu  
 not very I take at dawn what take you not coffee lunch  
 ‘I haven’t had much since dawn. Haven’t you had coffee and lunch...’

*eemi* <sup>+</sup>tagunu<sup>↑</sup> *eemitagunu neenu vellipottanu neenu ayo* <sup>+</sup>mi  
 what drink what I drink I come-go I excl your  
 ‘... and something to drink? What have I had? I came here. Oy! Your...’

*attagari* *alagayi* <sup>+</sup>bagunara<sup>↑</sup> ((hhh))  
 mother-in law mean are good  
 ‘... poor mother-in-law. Are you ok, though?’

87 P {ayo: mi ma:ma<sup>+</sup>garu aite mapatinuntʃə <sup>+</sup>teləsu<sup>↑</sup> ma: <sup>+</sup>frɛ:ndu<sup>↑</sup> ma:kə  
 ba:gə par<sup>+</sup>tʃjəmu:<sup>↑</sup>} ((hhh)) {<sup>+</sup>nuvi<sup>↑</sup> <sup>+</sup>endukamara<sup>↑</sup> <sup>+</sup>ravu<sup>↑</sup> ni<sup>+</sup>ku<sup>↑</sup>  
 badjatund<sup>+</sup>kadikada<sup>↑</sup> nu<sup>+</sup> ra:vala<sup>↑</sup> <sup>+</sup>leda<sup>↑</sup>} ((hhh)) {nabaitʃupe  
<sup>+</sup>tʃuperomami<sup>↑</sup>}

‘Poor me! I’ve been friends with your father-in-law since we were introduced a long time ago! Why don’t you come visit me? Isn’t your responsibility there just like it is here? Why don’t you come? Why don’t you send your son? Tell him he’s invited!’

88 P ((lau 7.8 sec))

89 C ((clap)) How is she<sup>↑</sup>?

(297 seconds)

90 P So she talks all these things in, uh, half an hour and (.6)

91 R So she’s, she’s a Brahmin<sup>+</sup>?



- 92 P She's a Brahmin
- 93 R ah, huh, huh, huh ... She's the: friend of your: ...
- 94 P My mother-in-law
- 95 R yeah
- 96 P Actually, my father-in-law and, uh, her husband ... both are colleagues
- 97 R Uh, huh
- 98 P In Vishaka Dairy (1.1)
- 99 R Very nice
- 100 P So, they're having apartments and she had purchased a home there, and ... she'll collect the rent and she'll give us
- 101 P So, she: asked me to, that, 'you are the' means you have to [live as ...
- 102 C [so you have seen how a prefect Brahmin speaks<sup>†</sup> ... and how faster it is ... but you know ... what is the imitation power of [Prithika
- 103 P [((lau))
- 104 R Oh yeah!
- 105 C You have seen it! ... but I don't have that
- 106 P ((continues laughing))
- 107 C Even, uh, I was like, star... actually, [if I see a Brahmin talking also
- 108 P [I don't do anything to hurt anybody
- 109 P just to make, uh, just for time pass
- 110 R yeah!
- 111 P that's all
- I don't want to hurt anybody ((lau))
- 112 R no, no
- 113 C Yeah! It's not like that ...
- 114 R no!
- 115 C Actually, eh, no, no<sup>†</sup> I don't know that ... how a Brahmin perfectly speaks as in some ... little bit, little bit
- 116 R uh, huh
- 117 C But I don't know completely (.7) so how they way (.5) she speaks (1.3)

- 118 P No, I don't have a perfect knowledge [of the language  
 119 C [exactly I can't say it! (.6)  
 120 P Yeah, no, I want to say that I don't have any perfect, uh, knowledge of the  
 language  
 121 R no  
 122 P But I can imitate, actually, what ... how they speak ... that's how (.5)  
 123 P I don't have perfect knowledge, but the way she talks ... she's a Brahmin  
 lady<sup>†</sup> (1.2) and she came last time with her daughter also (.7) she had  
 some business of ... like type printing or ... so she's asking us to  
 purchase that also (.4)

(386 seconds)

- 124 P {endi<sup>†</sup> bokslu<sup>†</sup> vətʃeɪndi tʃa:lakotə bokslu ba:<sup>†</sup>gunentə ba:<sup>†</sup>gunendi<sup>†</sup>  
 ((hhh)) varəvarəm petəskuntinandi<sup>†</sup> e:m<sup>†</sup> paduvatmled<sup>†</sup> kaldru  
 pindipetukunanu rubə petukunanu<sup>†</sup> ka:<sup>†</sup>jagorlupetkunanu ((hhh)) enta  
 ba:<sup>†</sup>gunajo<sup>†</sup> anʃi<sup>†</sup> konukuntara<sup>†</sup> miken frɪdʒu ped:ə ped:ə ((hhh)) frɪdʒelu  
 petukuntara<sup>†</sup> anʃi<sup>†</sup>((hhh)) ka:valəndi<sup>†</sup> ramantara<sup>†</sup> ((hhh)) vətʃeɪndi  
 vətʃinela nadegerə ni tiskostanu<sup>†</sup> isa:rə vastapəd<sup>†</sup> tetʃimantara<sup>†</sup> ((hhh))  
 aledama nakəvadulenisa}

'We just got brand new boxes; very good! Oh how great they are! From  
 week to week we can't keep them without them getting spoiled. You can  
 store flour and it won't get wet, or vegetables. But this price is very good  
 aunty. Will you buy some? How much could you keep in your big fridge?  
 Will you keep everything in your fridge? Would you like some of these  
 boxes? Shall I come (bring you some)? Please! Next month, I'll bring you  
 some as they come. No, dear, they aren't for me, I've said I don't need  
 them.'

- P then, I'll stop ((lau))  
 125 C ((lau))  
 126 P ((says something in Telugu, I haven't gotten that translated yet))

(426)

- 127 C Even I like ... the way, how a Brahmin speaks

- 128 R uh huh<sup>↑</sup>
- 129 C But I didn't find any way ... like I used to think ...  
 {ilə ilage ma[adutarə]}  
 'Speak like these people'  
 You are, you say no? ... they talk formally or when you, anyone comes,  
 they'll change the language ((hhh)) so even I'm ... I'm very much anxious  
 to how, how they speak ... they want to say them
- 130 P ((lau))
- 131 C Like, in other feel, am I enjoy the language (.7) so I didn't ((laugh/talk))  
 find like ((hhh)) how, if she is speaking, and he ... oh, ... uh, I ... you can  
 say that a perfectly Brahmin ONLY will speak like this
- 132 R hmm (.7)
- 133 C They only ((hhh)) suddenly, if they speak to us, ... we may be knowing  
 'why she is not talking to me like ... irrespectively, like ... how she...'  
 ((hhh)) then we can know, like, Brahmin ... the ... the language is like that  
 it's not, uh, (.6) making fun of us
- 134 R yeah
- 135 C Their language is like that (1.7)

### Appendix C - 'In your question lies the answer'

1004\_120704.WAV

Rough Translation:

- 1 Prithika: What's the difference between the Brahmins and the normal Telugu people?
- 2 Kanha: There are two sects of people, Brahmins and non-Brahmins.
- 3 P: There are different languages, I'm saying the difference between normal and Brahmin Telugu people.
- 4 K: We don't have Tamil people here, only the Telugu people. We have Brahmins and different caste people here in Vizag. Brahmins speak differently, and normal people speak differently. The Brahmins will tell a particular thing in a strong way so that you can understand them. They will say a thing in a strong way, using different slang. The normal people will have one type of slang, workers will have one slang, educated people have a slang, and uneducated people have a type of slang. Brahmin people, though they are educated or uneducated, their language is the same. But other castes, if they are educated the language changes, if they are uneducated their language is different. Brahmins speak clearly, they explain things clearly. Educated Brahmins will sometimes speak using English, but uneducated and educated Brahmins speak in the same way in their homes. That is their specialty, they don't change. They think that the language is in their control. Language is not their property, though.
- 5 P: We learn Telugu from their language, how did we get Telugu otherwise?
- 6 K: We all are born here, we know Telugu. We didn't learn from them. The thing is that the language is different when they speak. You all speak in Telugu but most people think that what the Brahmins speak is correct. So people think that they should follow those words. One main thing I can tell is that I am not a Brahmin, but from my childhood I was raised as a Brahmin. All of my friends were Brahmins, around my home. I was brought up as a Brahmin. My mother used to ask me to make friends with Brahmins so I would learn things from them. She also had many Brahmin friends. Because she encouraged me I was able to learn the Brahmin language, and now I can speak the Brahmin language. But people my age cannot speak that way because they didn't learn it when they were young like me. Even their parents didn't tell them to learn the Brahmin language, but my mom taught me to learn their language. My mom encouraged that friendship, to learn the language, but the non-Brahmin people, if they are educated, they speak differently.
- 7 P: How do we get the lecturers and teachers to teach Telugu? In olden times, who was given the chance to teach? Educated people, or Brahmins?
- 8 K: How can you say that? There is a lot of change before independence education was different, and now after it is different. There might be lots of questions if you say who taught the Telugu language. Before independence only Brahmins could learn anything. Now after independence anyone could study. Before independence, not only Brahmins but a few people also learned here and there. After independence, the government

allowed everyone to study. It is a right to every citizen of India. They made programs that help people get educated. Now we have Brahmins and non-Brahmins as lecturers, but before only Brahmins were the people who taught. Only for education.

- 9 N: What is the difference between the Brahmin language and the non-Brahmin language.
- 10 K: By the way you speak we can tell you are a non-Brahmin. In your question lies the answer. You said Brahmin *basaki* they will never say it like that. They will say Brahmin *bhashaki*. You are saying s and they say sh. The difference between your word is that. Do you understand now? If people are educated they can tell the difference there. We never say it like that. Commonly we said *chapunda* we will say *chaapa unda*. I can give one more example, we say *chembu* they said *sambu*. In this way there is a difference in pronunciation. If you say, *sembu* it's not a wrong word. People pronounce things differently, some will say *cheepa* some say *chaapa*. Though you spell it differently, the meaning is the same. No one will say that you need to say *chembu*, I say it differently, what will you do. There is no need to spell it as *chembu* only. Or else I will tell you to get lost. The language doesn't have rules that make you say it only in one way. Brahmins used to be in the king's court, writing poems and *slokas*. In day to day life they speak one way, but they won't speak in the literary language. They will ask their wife to get the food, but not using a *padyam* or poem. We use the normal words while speaking, but there is a difference between speaking language, writing and bookish language. Language is not the same. It always changes. Uneducated non-Brahmins, when they speak we can notice how they speak differently, but uneducated Brahmins, though they speak we don't find any difference between their language. I can only say things I know. Ask whatever you want.

### Appendix D - 'Can you tell?'

Portion<sup>31</sup> of Transcript from 0927\_174758.wav

- 3 R: How old are you?
- 4 M: I'm 39.
- 5 R: 39 years old and you're a professor, a doctorate?
- 6 M: A doctorate, yes.
- 7 R: In?
- 8 M: Anthropology.
- 9 R: Anthropology, ok. And you teach at Andhra University.
- 10 M: Yeah.
- 11 R: Do you mind if I ask which caste you belong to?
- 12 M: I belong to an upper caste. Called, uh, in some parts it is called Kaapu in some parts it called as Naidu. It's all (the) same. Little differences but I belong to an upper caste.
- 13 R: So my questions for you are regarding dialect, and you were, you were just speaking about the Jalari dialects and the different dialects. Can you tell if a person... Can you tell if a person is Brahmin by the way they speak? Do you think you can tell?
- 14 M: Hmm. Mostly.
- 15 R: How?
- 16 M: One obvious, uhh, way of differentiating a Brahmin dialect and a non-Brahmin dialect is... it is... more of a Sanskritized form; Sanskritized Telugu form. And, uh, they prefer to speak in such a way, it is more like, uh, the... you know it all, it came such in a way that, uh, these people, uh, give the slokas. They bless with slokas they always, it's, it's, sloka is the way. Even for a small thing, they, they, they try to imitate the sloka way into the vernacular language. That is one thing, where you can clearly say that, yeah, this could be a Brahmin the way he is speaking. Uh, and uh, you don't find this way of speaking with other communities. But to my surprise, some of the non-Brahmins friends with whom I have, they try to imitate, try to speak like a Brahmin.
- 17 R: Really?
- 18 M: Yeah. So they want to impress upon you that, "you must be a Brahmin?" I know some of my scholar friends, they speak in a such a slow, soothing, not in a hurry, as if

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<sup>31</sup> This transcript was edited to protect the identity of the interviewee. Additionally certain segments which contain information that was particularly discriminatory in nature have been omitted as they did not pertain to the topic at hand.

they are trying to make me out uh, feel that I'm talking to a Brahmin. And these are my, to tell you, from Scheduled Caste, the untouchable castes.

19 R: Really?

20 M: Yeah, they want to elevate the status by the manner. Not only just language but by the other mannerisms. The obvious mannerism is the vegetarian. So if you take a vegetarian food, the first impression is, you are a Brahmin. Then you try to come impress upon me with your language. So vegetarianism, language, gives you a status of Brahmin.

21 R: Is there a way of dressing as well?

22 M: Dressing you cannot make out.

23 R: You can't, you can't tell?

24 M: You cannot make out.

25 R: Ok. A lot of people have mistaken... we were, we were in Rajahmundry and Kanha was in the car with us. We went to an agraharam.

26 M: All the Brahmin are there. The priestly.

27 R: The Brahmin village, yeah.

28 M: Priests, yeah.

29 R: And as we were leaving the driver asked Kanha, "Are these your relatives?" And he said, "Yes." (Laughter) Um...

(Interrupted by short conversation with other people)

30 M: Until 1980's when we are in, uh, early 20's and on, even then I was able to identify a Brahmin by his skin. By his face.

31 R: His skin?

32 M: Yeah, they are, since they are for generations they are vegetarian people you find your skin is also different. Though they are brownish skin, it is more sublime, more pure, genetically they are a little different from the non-Brahmin face cuts. Now there is a, there is some degree of change. Even these untouchables, even the non-Brahmins also look, because of their eating habits, with the good nutritious food, they are looking a little bit brighter. But until 1980, to some people, not many I'm not saying. But by just looking, (you think) "He could be a Brahmin".

33 R: Really?

34 M: The way there is some kind of brightness in his face. A little smooth on this facial skin. Even there... even some of my friends, I can easily guess. They are very fair. Some Brahmins are also very dark, no doubt about that, there are real dark Brahmins also there. But something we can make out. This I could make out, but now it's all mixed up.

35 R: It's not, perhaps, a skin color, more as a skin texture or health of the skin, perhaps. Is that what you're saying?

- 36 M: Yeah. But genetically also, since they are generations pure Brahmin is a pure Brahmin. He's a pure Brahmin. Not so pure Brahmin. Like that you see, you know, some of the... for even girls. Brahmin girls. Brahmin girl; non-Brahmin girls. Lot of differences there. Their skin is so fresh, because of vegetarian food. These, the cells are light here (points to his cheek bones). If you eat non-vegetarian food you are taking dead cells. So that meat always gives you dead cells here (cheek bones). But now we cannot really identify by this thing. Just by face things or even by dress. Brahmins mostly, concerned this thing, they are always simply dressed.
- 37 R: Simply dressed?
- 38 M: Simply dressed until 80's or 90's. They wear the sandals chappals, because there is a saying, jagamellaniki brahminiki janjamela means "The Brahmin is well known around the world, there is no need to wear a sacred thread." You are already a scholar, a Brahmin scholar, a Sanskrit scholar, so no need to wear a sacred thread and say "I'm a Brahmin." If you don't wear a sacred thread also you are considered a Brahmin because you are popularly known. But that is the saying goes. So since, in village structure, if you see a village, Brahmins are very, since they have the, though they don't have economic status, but the rituals, since they are ritual specialists, they are considered to be pure, they are considered to be sacred, people always look upon them. "Yes, he's a Brahmin." So when you have the status of that, you have no need to impress with all these kinds of shoes with blazer, with kind of thing. The untouchables used to wear like that. You wear a shoe, you put a tie, you have to imitate a westerner and say that, "I'm something different."
- 39 R: "I'm important."
- 40 M: "I'm important." This is what Dr. Br Ahmendkar said to Dalits. Dalits means the untouchable communities. The erstwhile untouchables. Now the untouchability is a crime here. What you call the low castes. He said that you have to dress upon. You have to put... that's why whenever you see Ahmendkar picture you can see. He put a blazer and a tie, and holds a book and all. But this is opposite, Gandhi-like. Gandhi, he just only wear a loincloth. He wants other aspects. So mostly Brahmins who are textualized Sanskrit Brahmins they never go for these external things. Simple chappals, some done even wear chappals also. I know some mathematics professors, science professors in my other where I study in Hyderabad, they don't even wear chappals also. Barefoot.
- 41 R: Really?
- 42 M: Barefoot Brahmins. They are professors, but barefoot. But now you don't see that kind of stuff. It's all receded, I can say that. But this pure form of Brahminism you can see in Tamil Nadu, in Karnataka, Andhra. North Indian Brahminism is a little different. But here you can see this Vishnu (draws a line down the forehead), this Shivites (three lines across the forehead), and this, this, this kind of food restrictions which are things... It's a way of life. So when it comes, even if you go in Tamil Nadu also, there in Tamil, Tamil... Brahminized Tamil is different also from non-Brahminized Tamil. As in like Telugu, or in Karnataka. Karnataka I am not very fa... not aware of... I don't know...



not too familiar with Karnataka, but Tamil Nadu I can say. And Tamil Nadu Brahmins still hold a very good, high position. People revere them. People respect them.

43 R: Just as here?

44 M: They are not very violent on Brahmins. They are violent on other castes, but they are not too much... they give a little respect to Brahmins. Because of that... Because of that... uh. So when it comes to uh... it is a little difficult to say why they speak that kind of Telugu. And why we don't speak that kind of Telugu. And it is also being, they are mostly respected Telugu teachers. We always look upon to be taught Telugu only by a Brahmin teacher, only by a Brahmin teacher. We give importance to the, uh... I mean there are good non-Brahmin Telugu teachers. It is like, you know, English being taught by a British man rather than by a Chinese man. Or by an Indian to a Chinese. It's look awkward.

45 M: When I was in Singapore, when suddenly one Australian guy left halfway through the school, the college, he was still teaching literature, so I have to engage three, four classes. Then uh, yeah, that why am I teach some English classes for the Chinese. "What? An Indian guy teaching English to a Chinese?" You know (laughs), so (laughs). Yeah it looks awkward. Though we are very good in the subject. He's only a, eh, just an undergraduate, this Australian guy. He's just only an old man, you know, long back he studies, completed his only his bachelors degree. I'm more qualified with a Ph.D. and all and he's just an undergrad. But no, you need to have a native speaker. It is like, you cannot say, you know, that they are the custodians of Telugu language. You cannot dare. Some people say that they claim that we are custodians of, we are the, we are the, we are descendents of Sarasvathi Devi, we are born from, we are blessed with Sarasvathi Devi, Sarasvathi Devi bestowed upon all the choose on language, on knowledge and all these things.

46 M: But now there is a small Dalit intelligentsia, which is questioning. You know, it was, the saying goes it's like that, those who possess the knowledge are considered to be brahman. But now they are questioning, "Why you should be called as a brahman? Anybody can become a brahman. Those who possess knowledge. Why only Brahmins should become brahman non-Brahmins also can become brahman." This abounds in speech. You know, the voice coming from the low. Rather than, always upon.

47 R: That's one thing that's interesting to me is the voice from below. Like, the, the Dalit speaking. I mean obviously Dalit is an outdated term. Is it an outdated term now?

48 M: No, no, it is very much in the report.

49 R: But the, so in this case, that case of Dalits, coming from as we can say below, and saying, you know "why should the Brahmins be special?" What do the Brahmins say about this? Do you know anything about that? You know because the Dalits are all saying, "well anyone can be brahman". What do Brahmins think? Can anyone be brahman? Or is it only reserved to them?

- 50 M: Nehi it is only, it is a way of some kind of what you call, um, what you call, uh... questioning the social order, which is really hypothetical and historical. So, uh, it is not fixed. Even the caste system, historically it is based upon occupation. Even language, when it comes to language, it is basically related to occupation. If you look at the whole vocabulary of a particular caste language, or a community's, the whole lingua franca, it all depends upon their own occupation related words. If I'm a teacher, if I'm a Brahmin teacher, my entire vocabulary centers around my profession. Jalari's language is all centered upon...
- 51 R: Fishing
- 52 M: Is on fishing and is on goddesses. And even his uh, slang also centers around them. Brahmins slang centers around, interestingly, Brahmins slang you don't find in other, other caste slang. You look at some pictures, in Telugu movies, they have their own slang.
- 53 R: Are there Telugu movies that describe this?
- 54 M: Yeah, some... atla pinjari vedhava. Vedhava, emitra vedava, vedava is an idiot in the sense of this, not in the pure idiot sense, lower grade of idiot. Chi vedhava! Pove! Like, this only you find only in Brahmin. You don't find it, the vedhava word, in my understanding, maybe Kanha will give you a different picture. I don't know. What I feel. Vedhava! Ichi vedhava (slowly) this, vedhava! Is a Brahmin way of saying.
- 55 R: And what does that mean?
- 56 M: Vedhava means a lower form of idiot, but lower form. Not pure idiot.
- 57 R: Not very, not as degrading
- 58 M: As degrading as an idiot.
- 59 R: It's, it's perhaps slightly better than an idiot.
- 60 M: Brat, or something, you brat.
- 61 R: Punk, jerk.
- 62 M: Punk, jerk, yeah. This vedhava, chi vedhava, atla pinchari vedhava, emitra nu... this is a way of Brahmin, Brahmin way of slang, and Brahmin way of using the obscure, these words are for, you know, uh scolding. You don't find these words in non-Brahmin vocabulary. My understanding of why they have, wide vocabularies is perhaps it is all the text reading, text interpretation. Since from ages, professionally they have been with the texts. So naturally they could have invented, discovered, or trans-created these words.
- 15:36
- 63 M: When, if you go back, to look at the poets, the, the, writers. All majority, 80% of them are Brahmin. They were the people who were always into this literature; Telugu literature in terms of writing, you know, even these things. So it all spread to other Brahmins who are not into writing. If I am a writer, relatives will be there. Naturally I pass, pass on some words I, I when I talk to them, you also pick up... these words for this new

vocabulary. This poetic way, this literary way of saying slokas this thing all comes under this way of intermingling, these things. And non-Brahmins, perhaps, are not exposed to these kinds of things, not including their own vocabulary.

64 R: That's true. Have you read Kanyasulkam?

65 M: Not fully, but I'm aware of it.

66 R: I understand that, uh, that Appa Rao uses... uses Brahmin language in Kanyasulkam. And he, he... the way he writes, is describes the way Brahmins speak. Is that true. Are you, have you aware of that?

17:10

67 M: He is trying to, Kanyasulkam is a, is a, it is a, the whole issue is about the child marriages, you know the girl-child marriages, given to an old man, and the old man, old men used to, whoever had money, tried to purchase, in terms of, uh, what you call the bride price. Girls have a price, and you need to buy them. You offer some price to the parents, in-laws, and in return you get the girl. So in those days old men used to also take the younger brides for a price. So Appa Rao's work centers around this whole system of this bride price. Misuse of this bride price. Overuse of this bride price. Denial of women's rights. Women empowerment, that is the... It is the work called the cultural, the social issue. Which is an evil practice, this practice. And how it degrades women's rights, and how to empower them. Widow remarriage, child marriages, especially child marriage. Obviously in that he used this Brahminical way of, no it is a Brahminical way of... masculine, Brahminical way of dealing things, and what you call you can also say it is hegemonic practice. How Brahmins, hegemonically practicing this, this system of taking girls into denying their rights. In that process he used their language also, though he has, he has the, uh, the luxury of using the non-Brahminical, but it is the right way of exposing with their own language. With their own way of writings.

68 R: I think it would be very interesting to be able to identify the things, the aspects of that language.

69 M: If you look at the whole caste system also it is Brahminical. If you look at the whole intelligentsia, they say this is a Brahminical way of thinking. That higher, purity and pollution, purity and pollution basically it is Brahminical, so definitely what is pure what is impure? What is sacred what is profane? Why you, why you prescribed these unwritten rules to us? So even the language, why it is so Brahminical? And I have no need to tell you why certain words, as a linguist you know. Sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics will explain all that. Rather is it culture determines the language or language determines the culture? Sapir Whorf hypothesis.

70 M: So in that process, what is happening, new, new words are coming, but who is creating this? Is it Brahmins creating these new, new vocabulary or new ways of expression? But as far as my knowledge, in 1983, '84 there were some movies. There were some characters in those movies who where Brahmins trying to invent certain way of slang words. Atla pinchari vedhava nobody knows what is this word. So they

introduced this, atla pinchari, atla pinchari vedhava I don't know what is that. Pure Brahminical slang.

71 R: What movie is this?

72 M: There were, there are many movies.

73 R: You'll have to tell me a list of these movies so I can watch them.

74 M: We will check out all of these movies. So in these movies you find this Brahminical ways of... ways of scolding, Brahminical ways of satires, Brahminical ways of slang. Parallely, non-Brahminical slang also been came in pictures. In the movies. So it was in such a, like a railway track. If you go with your own we also have our way of our own slang and these things. The lower castes, the backward caste, they castes they have their own way. Who are the writers? Movie writers? They all come from the backward class and the lower classes. See obviously I bring my own cultural baggage, I don't, I don't, bring somewhere from the blues. I come from the rural village, I feel this right or this wrong, non-Brahminical backward castes or an untouchable caste, he tries to bring his own language into the movie and people become, a popular usage in the society. Movies are the ways, of, you know, bringing some kind of language or... by way of songs, songs.

75 R: By way of living?

76 M: Film songs. And the Indian brain, Indian mind is so engrossed with the movie language and movie phraseology and movie way of dressing. Movies bring fashions, you know. Where fashions come from? Movies bring. Where language comes from? Movies.

77 R: That's all she's studying is movies.

22:30-23:24

78 M: 2, 3 formula. If you look at Indian cinema by, by, who is it, uh...Benerji I think has written an article on Indian cinema. Indian cinema is basically on three formula: love, language, and uh, marriage. It starts with love, it ends with marriage, and in-between the whole fight. How to end up this love. Either it could be from Brahmin caste or non-Brahmin caste, or Reddy caste or any kind of... and it ends up in a marriage... the whole story revolves around these three formula: love, song, and marriage. And if it is little bitter, you have some fighting in there also. Anyway, this is Indian cinema.

79 M: Anyway, coming to language is also a part of this whole cultural process. Where you can clearly define, and it is reiterating the fact. Brahmins speak this way. Non-Brahmins speak this way. And you're identified. Then people can also, if I'm a Brahmin I wear a sacred thread, if I'm speaking non-Brahminical way, people don't accept me. I have to speak like a Brahmin. Society, there is an expectation, there is a perception.

80 R: That's true

81 M: And I cannot deviate your perception. Society is expecting something from me. I have to be pure. I have to speak in such a Sanskritized way. Should not use the slang words. Should not use non-acceptable phraseology.

24:32

82 M: And people used to make fun of Brahminical way of language. In the house, in non-Brahminical house, for just for fun, you know, that is an entertainment... they try to imitate like a Brahmin speaking. Bogunara meeru? (drawn out and very articulate) It's very Brahminical. Emitra chestunavu? It's a Brahminical way. Emitra chestunavu? It's a form of entertainment.

83 R: The slower speaking?

84 M: Yeah, then you would say, "Dad! You're speaking like a Brahmin. Why are you speaking?... Yes I'm speaking." (repeats imitation). So what we have to infer (from) this, your psyche, society is being in each culture, every culture, religion, caste, language are intermingled. And if Brahmins are custodians of Hinduism, if what people have an expectation of, "Yes you are a custodian of Hinduism, Sindu texts, Hindu ways of living." People expect from you.

85 M: Language, if you... religion, if you are a custodian of religion or custodian of language, you're a custodian of creativity... so far. Until now Brahmins are the custodians. As the women are custodians of tradition. As men are not the, we are... but it is always put on the women. You are the carriers of culture, we are not carriers. You are the defiling. If a women got married, Brahmin, non-Brahmin, non-Brahmin, Brahmin marriage, defilement. As the women are the sole carriers of culture and religion. There the fight comes. The conflict, the fight, non-acceptance of parents from Brahmin, non-Brahmin and these kinds of things.

86 R: So nowadays, is this still the same view? Is this all still the same thing. Do people still consider Brahmins to be the custodians of language and the custodians of education?

87 M: Mostly in rural areas. But it's changing. Changing. Changing very rapidly, very fastly. When I was a child, even intelligence, IQ levels are considered to be very high with Brahmins. This is a popular conception. Brahmins have a very good high IQ's, like whites and blacks.

27:12

(Portions omitted from transcript)

90 M: ... Brahmins have high IQ's, Brahmins are excelling in mathematics. Brahmins are good in, Brahmin boys are very good in mathematics. And I will tell you. It's very interesting. You will see only Brahmin girls in vocal singing, dance, (unintel) you see only Brahmin girls. Vocal singing, music, ragas, vocal solos.

91 R: Even still?

92 M: Mostly, 90%. Brahmin parents only send their daughters. You hardly see a non-Brahmin girl singing. Vocal, vocal, not the film songs and all. No the traditional vocal singing. Like raga, veena, all Brahmin. Bhartinakshi, your dance teacher, she's a Brahmin, you know? You see mostly Brahmin girls. Non-Brahmins do not, because they

think that this is their, we don't want that. Brahmins, and this is all Brahmin's business. Dance, vocal, all these things, professions are equal.

93 R: Sanskrit

94 M: Why should I? I don't think that... Uh, yeah. Dalit girl, dalit parents, uh schedule caste parents they never encourage their daughters to go on to take a dance, or to take... they go to, the encourage their child, go to church, not to this. You go to any dance class, you go to any music class, you will see 90%, 99% from Brahmin or from upper caste, Reddy, Kamma caste, Naidu caste. You hardly see a shepherd caste or a Dalit or uh...

95 R: Really, that's very interesting.

29:27

96 M: Because you, yeah, this is their dance and all... and language also is associated with these things.

97 R: Oh yeah, absolutely. Language is so much a part of the dance class. As with singing.

98 M: Ritual. Since Brahmins are considered to be ritual experts and we don't know what is the ritual and all of these things, so these mantras, slokas, is all ritual. So we don't, and basically they think, yeah you are identified with your own slokas with your own mantra and all these puja kind of a thing. Naturally their language is different because of these rituals,

99 R: Because of the rituals, yeah.

100 M: rituals. Ritual way of things. And it is also partially associated with the jyothisha, astrology. Palmistry. So this is closely associated with these things, and uh, these occupations are so blurred. Astrology, Palmistry, Ritual. People who go only to a Brahmin to get his own fate. What is my own fate? (rambles as a Brahmin would in English about someone's fate).

31:17

101 M: Who will tell all of these things, Brahmin only will tell them. Yeah you are the guy who is specialized in all this knowledge and all these things. "Sir I'm very worried already, somebody should consult a Brahmin." Who specialized in ritual. And people are, you are only identified with your language. You have to be different with your language. If I want to consider you as a brahman, and I want to be different from you, what makes the difference between you and me? It is only language.

102 R: It's true.

103 M: Who cares, if you speak like me, "Is he a Brahmin, what kind of Brahmin is he? His language is not pure, his Telugu is not pure." People say like that, commonly.

104 R: Even though it may not, it may be better that theirs still.

105 M: People used to make fun, you know? "What kind of Brahmin is that guy? He's not speaking proper Telugu. He's a spoiled Brahmin." They used to make jokes! "There is no

purity in your language!” Again we ask what is purity? In a language... eternal question. What is this? Purpose of language is to communicate.

32:36-36:44

106 M: The point is that, coming to this Brahminical, non-Brahminical way of speaking, what language they are speaking, what influences a particular community to speak a particular language, a particular vocabulary, or set of vocabularies. So culturally I think you have to infer that, historically, professionally, by region-wise, this makes the difference between Brahmin and non-Brahmin. I mean urban, if you come to urban areas, non-Brahmins also try to have a standard dialect. Which people cannot make out. I am in a teaching profession, I am a lecturer. I’m not a Brahmin, I’m an upper caste non-Brahmin, so in my family, both my parents are also from university. So they are bringing the standard acceptable, pleasing way of speaking Telugu, irrespective of what communities you belong to. It is like closer to Brahmin way of speaking. And for an outsider, a Brahmin and non-Brahmin speaking, highly educated non-Brahmin, a pure traditional Brahmin speaking mostly they are similar. In terms of vocabulary. Maybe the pronunciation is a little different.

107 R: In terms of the use of high vocabulary.

108 M: Vocabulary is ok. But little pronunciation. There is also a saying in my childhood days, “If you eat non-vegetarian, your tongue will become thick and you cannot practice sloka.” You have to be vegetarian so your tongue will be thin and you can speak any Bhagavad Gita and any sloka and all. So that is the reason Brahmins are vegetarians. Their tongue is very thin and they are very good with sloka, singing.

39:00-39:08

109 M: You guys, you eat non-vegetarian food you. Non-Brahmins eat non-veg food, your tongue becomes thick, you cannot, your sloka is atrocious. You know your song is atrocious. You cannot have a fine impression upon your tongue. This was the saying. But slowly the view is changing now. How can you figure out that eating non-veg makes your tongue thick and you cannot speak. Intelligence is being challenged. Brahmin vs. non-Brahmin.