

The Vedda Speech: A Linguistics Study with Special Reference to Dambana, Sri Lanka.

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Introduction

The intent of this research is to examine the Vedda speech from a linguistic point of view. Vedda speech has aroused much debate in learned circles ever since the early twentieth century, especially with the research being launched by Seligman (1911) and Wilhelm Geiger (1914). The culture and the speech of the Veddas have slowly started vanishing and today there is no original Vedda speech remaining. Among the remaining few hundred Vedda people, there have been many inter marriages occurring and the old ways of living have slowly begun to decay.

Research Problem

The most popularly accepted theory is that Vedda speech is only a regional dialect of the Sinhala language or Creole and that there is no separate Vedda language. Even if there are too many diverse opinions and conflicting views existing within this area of scholarship, a systematic analytical linguistic analysis of Vedda speech has not been undertaken so far.

Objectives of the Study

The primary objective is to analyze the linguistic features of Vedda speech based on their overall socio - cultural background and identify the current situation of Vedda speech.

The secondary objective of this research is to identify whether Vedda speech is a distinct language or a dialect of Sinhala or Creole.

Methodology

As my research is a qualitative empirical research and the aim is to get a better understanding through firsthand experience, truthful reporting and quotation of actual conversations, I have used participant observation as a method for data collection. In this study, the most popular method of field

linguistics, which is the interview method, was adopted to collect data. When I collected the data I used unstructured In-depth interviews.

Vedda speech has been identified by some scholars as a Creole which has emerged through many years of language contact between the original Vedda language and Sinhalese. If we view Creolization as a predominantly socio-historical concept of disenfranchised vernacular developed in European plantation environment, we clearly encounter the problem of historical accuracy and social nature. Vedda speech is not a product of such conditions. Based on the nature of the restructuring, as well as the socio-historical conditions, it claims that the admixture is a result of gradual, not radical change, motivated by typological and social pressure of the dominant language, especially Sinhala. However, there is no historical evidence, nor social motivation for Creolization of Vedda speech. Thus, Vedda speech does not meet any classification of Creole genesis which has been given by Creolists. The traditional view of evolving of Creole is the former pidgin state. The term pidgin has been used to define a language which has no native speakers, but has arisen out of necessity when two or more speech communities who knew very little if anything of each other's language have suddenly come into contact, and have therefore had no ready means of communication. Note that this does not apply for the origin and expansion of Vedda speech in Sri Lanka and historically there is no reason for an abrupt change in Vedda speech.

Vedda speech has limited vocabulary because earlier Veddas had a very simple language as they needed only few words to live in the jungle and also they themselves did not use language much with the intention to avoid animals being afraid. There, the necessity for inter- language and complexity of life were very low, because their survival was determined more on isolated ways of life rather than group style. When we analyze the Vedda speech, the simplification and the reduction of morphology is not a Creole feature of Veddas, and the reason is that the Vedda speech is a simple hunting language. Due to the cultural assimilation, it merged with the Sinhala language and now it shows a close relationship with colloquial Sinhala.

According to all above facts we can assume that there is no historical evidence, or no social motivation for Creolization of Vedda speech, and unlike the Creole situation, the phenomenon of language contact and mixing often plays a very important role in the history of Vedda speech.

Present day Vedda speech in Vanniya, is more influenced by the “Binthenne Basa” which is the dialect of Sinhala in the Vanniya area. Most of the words in Veddi Jana Gee are composed by Binthenne Basa and because of this reason the Vedda speech has been identified by some scholars as a dialect of Sinhala.

According to archeological and historical evidences, Vedda’s are recognized as the first inhabitants of Sri Lanka and their language has existed in Sri Lanka from even before arrival of Aryan. These evidence has proved that the Vedda lived in this Island before the existences of Aryan and they might have spoken a very simple language since the necessity of inter-language and complexity of life were very low, because survival was determined more on their isolated way of life. Present day Vedda speech is close to the colloquial Sinhala due to long years of language contact, but some of its vocabulary especially terms associated with forest and their life style cannot be closely related to Sinhalese and this can be an impact from a languages spoken before the adaptation of the Sinhala language since some words are not derived from Indo Aryan languages.

When we analyze the original Vedda speech, the occurrence of the number of non Sinhalese Aryan words in the Vedda vocabulary seems to us of considerable importance. It proved that the Vedda had their own language from the inception and it could be a very simple hunting language with limited vocabulary. Because of the inadequacy of data in the early Vedda speech, it is difficult to define the early stage of Vedda speech properly and the present day Vedda speech can best be classified, as a mixed language based on socio cultural assimilation between Vedda people and the majority (Sinhala and Tamil) for a long period of time. The Sinhalese, who comprise of about 70 percent of the population and the Sri Lankan Tamils, who are about 12 percent since census counts were taken, continue to exert a powerful cultural influence on Veddas.

Conclusion

Finally this research has found that the Vedda speech is not a dialect of Sinhala in the traditional sense, nor do they meet the criteria to be classified as a Creole and, the present generation of the Veddas are neither conversant with their cultural practices nor are they fluent in their language, hence, making

them rapidly Sinhalesed just as the Vedda in the other parts of the country that they are makes them rapidly Tamilized.

Key words: Dialect; Creole; Language; Vedda Speech

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