



**ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER**

**Education**

**THE FITNESS OF LANGUAGE, THE FORMATION OF A SPEECH COMMUNITY: A FLIP THROUGH PERIODICAL MAGAZINES FOR WOMEN**

**KEY WORDS:** Language, fitness, speech community, popular, market.

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**ABSTRACT**

A language evolves when it acquires the agency to handle any domain of knowledge. This is referred to as the fitness of language. Ordinary day-to-day language is inadequate to communicate topics related to finance, sports, technology and so on. The involvement of various speech communities proves to be critical here. This in turn plays a role in the development of a speech community. By analysing women's periodical magazines based on the topics mentioned above, this paper attempts to examine the extent of language's fitness in these topics and the manner in which the market makes use of the speech community that gets created as part of it. A group that shares a particular mindset and makes use of linguistic diversity may be called as speech community. This thesis elucidates how periodicals like Vanitha and Grihalakshmi influence the community of women readers through a linguistic diversity that is simple, attractive, open and flexible.

**Literature review**

There are several women-oriented periodical publications in Malayalam. These publications create a specific speech community. Books such as *Samoohika Bhashashastram* and *Englishaavishtamaya Malayalam* by C.J. George discuss the formation of speech community. Gerard Van Herk's *What is Sociolinguistics* addresses new models of sociolinguistics. Vanitha and Grihalakshmi are two popular Malayalam publications best suited for a sociolinguistic analysis to study the role such magazines play in the creation of women's perspectives.

Periodicals play a decisive role in the formation of a speech community. Periodicals related to trade and commerce, columns pertaining to business and finance, sports journals, women's magazines and so on contribute to the formation of diverse speech communities. An attempt is being made here to investigate the role of publications like Vanitha and Grihalakshmi in the creation of a speech community in which the fitness of language has clearly manifested.

Publications such as these that are at the forefront of marketization have critically influenced the creation of speech communities. Along with women's publications, advertisements that repeatedly appear on television channels also have a role to play in this. The social media is further accelerating this process through online women's publications. Thus a coordination of various media that accords a uniform fitness to language attempts to reshape the body, language and speech community. The socio-cultural milieu of developed countries gets presented in the context of Kerala at various levels.

It is the market which, based on its preferences, fixes the price of goods and services. For this reason, advertisements have an upper hand in the cultural chain when it comes to the 'creation' of preferences. In the production-exchange-distribution-consumption chain, it is exchange that enables the product to reach the consumer. In the present day, the process of distribution has become one that can be carried out in a planned and easy manner through the online mode. Print publication is also active as one of the several modes of language exchange that influence the market. The manner in which language interacts with the market is something that needs to be looked at seriously. It is this domain, which is crucial in the formation of a speech community, that is problematized in this study.

To look sociolinguistically at the language that has been employed by the Vanitha publications in order to make their news and features attractive is the method that has been adopted in this study.

For this purpose, Vanitha and Grihalakshmi magazines published in two different time periods have been considered. The reason for choosing Vanitha and Grihalakshmi over other similar magazines is that these two popular magazines have been able to ensure woman-friendly fitness of language and to mould a market-friendly speech community.

To present matters by relating them to the experiential world of women, to transform into favourable speech communities those places where women come together, and thereby secure a place in the hearts of women and so on are the commercial interests of women's periodicals including Vanitha and Grihalakshmi. Nurturing a speech community is a means by which they try to achieve this.

When a language designed to communicate with women emerges from these publications, the group that receives this language develops itself into a speech community. The creation of such a speech community does not happen with just one or two issues of the publication but through a series, over a long period of time. It is in the selection of the contents that its politics lies. Every page that is set aside for women includes intellectual flirting. As far as the language is concerned, one can discover in these a cultural pattern that desires an engagement by women.

For a language to acquire the resourcefulness to cater to the needs of every domain of knowledge is what is meant by the fitness of language. The ideas of the sociolinguist C.J. George with regard to the concept of speech community may be summarised as follows:

Speech is not merely a collection of sound units. The social environment associated with the speaker, material disparities in society, the mental makeup of the persons involved in communication, living conditions—all these factors control and define language. The structure of a language is influenced by the struggles and inequalities in the society to which that language belongs. Language is a sign that reflects the social sense and the culture of the speech community.

Varieties of discourse that a speech community creates are linked to caste, religion, class, occupation and region. The history of every community, knowledge passed down through generations, and beliefs reflects through this diversity of language.

Society is interpreted as an aggregate of people living in a particular cultural environment. A collection of people who live in a particular social environment and who employ for communication a language that reveals their class traits may be considered as a speech community.

Each word conveys meaning through a mutual understanding established between members of different collectives. It is the social and cultural uniqueness of a community that gets reflected in linguistic signs that they employ. It becomes possible to discern the social status of the speaker and the listener from the unique manner in which they use language. Sociolinguistics is the result of developing a dynamic linguistic approach that links studies by dialectologists that recognize linguistic differences with social discourse (George, C J, *Sociolinguistics*).

Vanitha makes use of language in such a way that it caters to the needs of the market and by representing all aspects of the market.

In contrast to the academic language, the language employed in this magazine is mild and aesthetic in nature. Emphasis is laid upon emotional appeal. Female body becomes a subject of great importance. The day-to-day lives of women are expressed in a simple and attractive style. In short, an open and flexible style of language is what can be found in these publications.

Consider, for instance, the column 'Needle and Thread' (Vanitha, February 15-28:98-99).

Steal the limelight at the teenage party, with this rich-looking layer dress! The reader is invited to try this gown by offering an assurance that its simple design and heavy look will conquer everyone's heart. Get a rich and heavy look at parties! Simply, despite not being high class. This is more than sufficient to attract a middleclass woman. A high-born lady or a vulgar woman? No such academic value judgements. Every page gets filled with a standpoint based on wealth and one that gives prominence to the middle class.

Readers are chosen by means of the question, Interested in designing and stitching clothes? This is followed by a direction to send pictures of two different designs to Vanitha. It could be a photograph or a sketch. Designs that get selected will be published in the Needle and Thread column. It is by ensuring such continuity, employing motivational language, that several columns manage to stay alive.

A review of *Peranmb* in Star Chat (Vanitha February 15-28, 2019:112). This is not about Mammooty. It is about Sadhana. Notice the descriptions. Ram s Chellamma, Amuthavan s Paappa, Mammukka s Chellakutti, mother s dancer, Malayali s own girl. By becoming Malayali s own girl, the intimacy has grown stronger. Moreover, Malayali special black tea and banana chips have always been my weakness. There s one another weakness, Nivin Pauly. I watch his films at least five times...With this said, Sadhana has done everything that is needed to get the reader hooked. The reader is also gripped by the eagerness to go and watch the movie. In the next page, a close-up of a smiling Sadhana Lakshmi with ornaments round her neck and dangling from her ears. Photographed by Venkatesh. Everyone generally knows that this is exactly what women s publications intend to do. It is when a speech community is precisely defined that a page of this kind becomes a superior product in the market.

Take a look at the cartoon column called Pushpull and this is what you will observe (Vanitha February 15-28, 2019:114):

Sunday was our twentieth wedding anniversary...Did you see the diamond ring my husband gifted me? Thus begins the neighbour woman s brag. Booking an Audi, going on a holiday to Malaysia and Singapore...while the boasts go on, the other lady says that she has been attending stress-buster classes since a month. And then she says, in the past when I could no longer stand the boasts, I would spit out the choicest abuses that came to my mouth. But now I have learnt to say, very nice. The cartoon series Pushpul finds acceptance

among readers as an inventive piece that satirizes middleclass boasts.

This cartoon engages in issues that more or less satisfy a large chunk of admirers among its average readers. The cartoons make a statement about what type of woman one should not be. They are also found to critique various aspects of a husband wife relationship.

Cooking, child rearing, personal grooming, making handicraft products, film reviews, actors family stories, likes and dislikes, personal stories of professionally successful women this is the nature of the contents of most women s periodicals.

There would be an exam special when the exam season arrives. This is usually found tagged to the section on child rearing. Exam is my best friend. A middle shot of a mother and daughter without much of an age difference.

Recommendations like let there be positivity at home, let there be no ban on entertainment, study tips, lazy titles like Can study more if you eat more is a myth and so on are designed in multicolors and printed. Also seen are uniform-wearing children. Such pro-women titles and boxes with advice to reach the exam hall with care appear seasonally in these publications.

Savouring three non-veg pickles, Tapioca Biriyanis is a phenomenon, Bring novelty to your breakfast there are many special characteristics to the linguistic expressions in the cookery realm and the use of masalas. The dishes prepared for the camera would attract anybody. The details of the recipe and the method of preparation offer to those who have read it but have no plans of preparing the dish, the same amount of pleasure that those who prepared the dish and consumed it had experienced.

Women s areas of interests are limited to cooking, dance, music and other arts.

Columns introducing the new initiatives and experiments in dressing styles, cinema, travel and other entertainments; is hair fall the problem 'and such issues that would motivate an average woman to flip through the pages constitute the diverse topics that enrich women s periodicals. It can be seen that the food-related columns that feature in such periodicals play an important role in making Malayali women investing great amounts of time in preparing delicious food. In comparison to people of other countries, people in Kerala take great delight in cooking an elaborate spread with multiple dishes overlooking the time needed for the preparation.

It may also be observed that such publications tend to ignore issues that mainstream society is actively involved with. When Arpo Arthavam, an event celebrating menstruation, became a hot topic of discussion in mainstream society, nothing worth mentioning pertaining to the use of menstrual cups or advertisements related to sanitary napkins appeared in these women s publications. There is a tendency to confine women to expression of feeling. Face cream ads reveal through language that softness and shine of skin constitute beauty and promote use of such creams.

In any advertisement related to food, the face is that of a woman or a girl. The sale of In-shape, prompts women to become slim beauties. Even here, ideas of feminine beauty are not formulated by the women community. Hair talks and advertisements that enter into the domain of gender issues and body shaming by saying things like if you are a woman, you need hair, but not under the nose are fewer today. The global collective of advertisement creators have made a decision to develop politically-correct gender aesthetics.

Recent ads of Bhima Jewellers and Red Label tea are examples of this. Beauty care post Caesarean, what a pregnant woman should know, and so on are still the major highlights of the health section. A world of women's bodies is transparent outside and inside of these publications.

On seeing the wedding photos, Tamil Nadu asked, When was this? Who's the groom? Oops, isn't this Rahul Raveendran? So were they in love? Is the wedding over? Aishwarya Rajesh's response to all of this breaking into laughter. No, my wedding isn't over. What you saw are the photographs of my new movie, the Tamil remake of The Great Indian Kitchen. Will let you know when I get married (Vanitha, June 26 July 9, 2021:15).

The language adopted here is that of gossip and of lying. Even when it gets transferred into the print medium, care is taken not to abandon the language of falsehood. Gossip, is something that is told. When a reader tells it to another person in exactly the same way, a speech community gets formed there. It is also important that suspense is broken only in such a way that it satisfies the fans.

The fitness page that tells people to set aside ten minutes for yoga prioritises stretching over everything else. With work from home getting popular, most people work on their laptops either resting on their sofas or on their beds arching their backs like an inverted U. Such wrong postures cause trouble to the spine and joints. The fitness page then goes on to say that stretching proves to be beneficial to the neck, shoulders, hands, waist and legs. A language that deals with health topics coupled with the photo that goes with it attracts a lot of women towards this. The photo used here features a young woman sitting flexibly and working at a table with a laptop, burger and a soft drink on it (Vanitha, 2021:18).

Under the title *Ishtakkoottile Omanakal* (Darlings of the Cage), the market of exotic pet-animals ranging from pocket monkey to mini horse is introduced using several colour photographs. The language used in the subtitles is interesting: *Baby called marmoset, Innocent Spider, Don't call tarantula a mere spider, In the land where snakes are cherished* such are the titles, brimming with love. Write-ups by veterinary doctors and lots of information regarding exotic pets along with their attractive prices are beautifully presented.

Generally most issues of the magazine conclude with features starting from 'Weave love in your free time', 'Smile a lot', 'Driving an interesting game', making interiors more beautiful, preparing hot soup, and mental health, and ranging as far as 'Become a subscriber of Vanitha Home

Grihalakshmi features an interview with Kunjakko Boban titled *Isa transformed my life* (April 1-15, 2021). All the attention is clearly focussed on the photographs of Chakochoan and his family, including on its cover page. This issue includes topics like 'The beauty of floral-printed sarees', 'The secret behind the tasty fish fry', 'Is skin fasting beneficial to those with acne?'

A report titled 'What was lost at Nandadevi', describing the events of 1976 based on the book *Nandadevi: The Tragic Expedition* is featured in this issue under the category of Memoir, narrating an exceptional life story from the dreamland of mountaineers (Grihalakshmi, 2021:88-89).

Vanitha mediates through social media also. Highlights of a Clubhouse discussion titled 'Decision maker @ home' was shared in one of its issues under the caption 'Who calls the shots?' (Vanitha, June 26 July 9, 2021:10-13). Even while making decisions, there are male decisions and female decisions, 'What's important is not who should decide but how a good decision can be made' and many such opinions

chosen from the discussion have been included in this article.

Related to Vanitha magazine, a speech community has already come alive in Clubhouse incorporating the latest trends in media activity. Perhaps a speech community that Vanitha had imagined at various different locations have now assembled together on a social media platform simultaneously. The thing that can be understood when analysing the reports is that it is a speech community that got itself involved through the print edition of Vanitha magazine, not those who speak with a difference on women's empowerment, are the speakers on the new platform

Understanding women's bodies, minds, fashion, likes and dislikes and so on and developing a language that best communicates with them is what Vanitha publications do. Practically, this language reaches women readers and results in the formation of a speech community.

Once women's lives are inside such speech communities, then the pace of marketization hastens.

Capitalizing on the consumer and interests that yield easily, the market maximizes its profit.

It motivates thoughts to remain confined to the household assuming that the domain of knowledge is alien. Even when woman's potentials and thoughts are controlled and confined to a speech community; nevertheless, the lure of enjoyment and aesthetics within it make them feel satisfied and happy.

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