The Importance of Dialectal Variation in Kerala Curriculum Framework

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Abstract

Purpose: From prior research, language variation is observed to beneficially influence the field of education. Following this hypothesis, the study verifies the importance of dialectal variations in a language, specifically in Malayalam. The study strives to answer the need for linguistic equality and how this can be achieved through the curriculum.

Approach/Methodology/Design: A mixed method approach was adopted using questionnaire and personal interviews. Data was collected from University students between the age group 20-30. The material of the study involved different lexical items. The data was analyzed by accounting the number of occurrences and its percentage. Pivot chart was tabulated of the percentage of dialectal variations lexical items against each participant in different category.

Findings: The study revealed the lack of awareness of dialectal variations that existed in the selected lexical items. This neglect provides an evidence of the progressing decline in language lexicon that is detrimental to language growth and preservation of vocabulary. The study illustrates how this can be rectified through the curriculum by incorporating dialectal variations in the textbooks.

Practical Implications: The study will contribute positively to understanding the importance of incorporating dialectal variations to preserve the existing language lexicon by accommodating the non-standard variation. This step ensuring the equality of regional elements would help in an effective and successful learning of language.

Originality/value: This study takes into consideration the regional variations that exist in Malayalam language spoken in Kerala. The study provides a base for further research into mapping dialectology.

1. Introduction

Over the years, significant importance has been given to documenting variations in language use. The variations within a language whether phonological, morphological, lexical or syntactical are addressed in sociolinguistics. In cases where the internal variations within a language allow the language to be mutually intelligible, the languages are said to be dialects of the particular language (Chambers & Trudgill, 1980). In this scenario, one particular dialect assumes the status of standard language. Often times, the emergence of the Standard Language (SL) or the Language of Instruction (LOI) depends on factors that are historical, political, cultural, ideological or pedagogical. Either way, the dialects provide us with linguistic diversity. Dialectal variation should not be confused with slang that are used by particular group of people. Though slang is vocabulary driven and well-defined in terms of

social and regional boundaries, it is an informal form of speech and is closely associated in being part of informal register rather than dialects of the language (Crystal, 1995).

Internal variations can be observed at different levels: phonological, morphological, lexical and syntactic. There have been several views regarding the categorization of these variations. One accepted view is the categorization based on social class or geographical/regional differences (Holmes, 2001). On this basis, dialects are classified as social or regional dialects. The study of dialects on account of above said regional differences is dialectology. Dialectology comprises the mapping of linguistics sub-regions. Accordingly, one can present a dialect map. In Kerala, dialect variation can be dominantly observed via geographical differences though there are elements of social differences.

Theoretically establishing a definite categorization between the dialects is difficult (Wardhaugh, 2006). However, Romaine (2002) summarizes the difference between the two by stating that the regional dialects tell where we are from while social dialects tell who we are. Despite the complexities in categorizing variations, a certain variety becomes the standard language with other varieties as non-standard dialects. The topic of how one variety of language gets regarded as the standard language is of prime importance in the field of sociolinguistic (Cook, 2003; Cheshire, 2005 and Labov, 2003). Majorly this involves a study of government planning and policy changes.

Gradually with the use of a standard variety, a norm began to be observed with regard to the phonological, morphological rules and lexical words. This norm covers decades of print, media and education. At present, when discussing the importance of variations within a language, the focus is not to bring about a change in the standard language; rather it is the official education of the variation. The paper thus tries to validate the importance and need of an official education of variation that exists between the language dialects.

Regional variations are confined to a particular space and often do not find their way across, unless through migration. In situations where migration does happen, the variations are introduced to the subsequent place but they get subdued under the variations that already exist in that particular space. The result is the slow disappearance of the particular variation. This brings us to the question of how much of these variations have disappeared over the years. Though it is not a new scenario, it is one that must be addressed immediately. This does not diminish the importance of study on language extinction rather it emphasizes the need to incorporate dialectal variations as an additional subject of study.

2. Literature Review

Prior research has also highlighted the advantages of incorporating student's variety (dialect) in education. According to Tegegne (2015), the student's native dialect helps in effective and successful learning. He discusses two hypotheses on language variations that have influenced the field of education; the Deficit hypothesis and the Differences hypothesis. The former advocates for the eradication of the use of dialects in favor of the standard dialect while in the latter, non-standard dialects are seen as different ways of expressing the same idea. This advocates for the use of the non-standard varieties for educational purposes. In a study conducted by Solano-Flores and Li in 2006; it was observed that students performed better when they were administered tests in the local dialect than the standard dialect of the language Haitian-Creole (Tegegne, 2015).

The worst causality among the dialect disappearance is the slow fading away of lexical words. Lexical repertoire is crucial for any language. At present, language teaching educators emphasize the importance to incorporate more vocabulary in teaching and learning. Many studies have associated enhancing the dimensions of lexical repertoire as a source of enriching vocabulary and treasuring language. Though over the years, language word formation continues increasing with numerous new coined words or loaned words, the decrease in words that once belonged to the lexical repertoire of the language is on the rise. Matras (2010) discusses the same in light of the Romani dialects in Britain. With the replacement of English lexicon across the language, Romani lexicon slowly stated depleting. Subsequently, Romani language retreated with increasing use of English words. This is especially true in cases of language that has a number of dialects with an evolving standard or norm language.

In Kerala, a state that has 14 districts it can be said that there are as many dialects of Malayalam as the number of districts. Broadly classified, there are three major regional dialects- south, central, north. There are also differences in dialect along social lines with respect to caste and religion. Prior studies in the field of dialect studies of Malayalam have predominately been done on social lines of religion, caste and tribe. These studies (Subramoniam, 1974; Bhattacharya, 1976; Gopinathan, 1975) provide a comprehensive picture of the linguistic variation present in the state ("Language variation and external influence," n.d.). The dialect survey by V.I. Subramoniam in 1974 identifies twelve dialect areas; South Travancore, Central Travancore, West Vempanad, North Travancore, Cochin, South Malabar, South Eastern Palghar, North Western Phalgat, Central Malabar, Wayanad, North Malabar and Kasaragod. His survey identified these areas through the analysis of Malayalam spoken by Ezhavas and Tiyyas. However, since these studies are individualistic in nature and often deal with one certain community or caste, it is not systematically done from the dialectal point of view.

According to Ethnologue, the regional dialects are; Central Kerala, Kasaragod, Kayavar, Malabar, Malayalam, Mappila, Nagarai-Malayalam, Namboodiri, Nasrani, Nayar, North Kerala, South Kerala, Pulaya (Malayalam, n.d.). These regional dialects are dependent on regional, community and caste lines. The Mappila dialect (spoken by the Mappila Muslim community on Kerala, predominately in Malabar region) differs very significantly from the literary Malayalam when compared to the other dialects in the state. Among the dialectal regions in Kerala, the central Kerala dialect (used in Kottayam district) shows the closest affinity to the written Malayalam SL. The dialectal variations with respect to differences in the pronunciation are mostly colloquial and do not find their way into the formal written format. On the other hand, vocabulary of dialectal variation can be depicted in written format. Officially, Kerala government has signaled the variation in dialects at the district level.

3. Language Education in India and Kerala

Following the independence of India in 1947, the attention given to education became a major concern to the government of India and the state. From the very first National Education Policy, NEP 1968 and the later 1986 policy, the focus has been to incorporate the cultural and geographical diversity in the nation's education system. The latest National

Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2005 guidelines on language, upholds the multilingual[1] character of Indian society. The curriculum emphasizes the need to implement the three-language formula[2] to promote multilingual proficiency and national harmony. Focus should be on the recognition of children's home language(s) or mother tongue(s) as the best medium of instruction (these include tribal languages).

In Kerala, in the quest to implement the three-language formula, the option of learning other foreign languages or Indian languages affected the study of mother tongue (Kerala Curriculum Framework (KCF) 2007, p.43). Kerala Curriculum formulators attempt to address this issue, realizing the extent to which the neglect of the mother tongue has been overlooked for a long time. The KCF states that Kerala is one of the only states in India that has not made the learning of mother tongue mandatory to complete one's school education. To remedy this, the new curriculum highlighted the study of mother tongue as the learner's right. The curriculum posits that all learners must be given the opportunity to learn the mother tongue in all stages of schooling. Presently, mother tongue teaching involves just the standard Malayalam, not taking into consideration the elements of differences between them. As rightly said by policy makers, a standard language is necessary for the proper function of government and educational systems. Therefore, this warrantees a uniform norm in official documents, newspaper and textbook formulation. However, the suppression of dialectal variation has been significant in the study of language. The KCF 2007 states that, "the importance accorded to the standard variety of language affects the mother tongue adversely. The domestic language and the dialectical variant of the mother tongue used by the child should be recognized. Language should not be a stumbling block in the construction of knowledge and self-expression" (pp.44-45). Accordingly, at the pre-school, KCF advocates the need to have a framework that has the scope to adapt according to the regional diversities (KCF 2007, pp.74).

There is also a special mention in the KCF 2007 regarding the language variation present in tribal language with respect to the standard language in textbook. The curriculum states the need for "providing learning environment in tribal areas to use their local dialects in standards 1st and 2nd and then shift to formal language" (pp. 76) in the section of learning environment. Keeping in mind the variations within the language, KCF 2007 points out the need to include language variations: "The textbooks may be prepared at the district level, considering the regional elements" (pp. 42). This is far from being done.

Also, the need for such a change is relevant on account of the present homogenized nature of Malayalam language present in the textbook. Though the NCF 2005 posits the need to formulate a curriculum that deals with children from different ethnic, social and cultural background, it has not been reflected in the KCF 2007. The latter ignores the diversity that exist in the variations and attempts to homogenize the curriculum with the 'Standard Malayalam' that's visible in all official transactions. What goes unheard is the dialectal variations and the mention of the language of tribal communities in the textbook. In case of the latter, steps are being taken by the school educators and teachers to help in the easy synthesis of standard Malayalam with tribal language.

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[1] Multilingualism in education refers to the use of two or more languages as medium of instruction.
[2] Three-language formula: In the Hindi speaking states, the languages taught must be Hindi, English and any other Indian language. In the non-Hindi speaking states, the languages taught are the regional language, English and Hindi.

The process to the formation of textbook at different districts level is not an easy task. Also, an attempt to involve all linguistic stylistics and variations that exist in each dialect is not probable. Such an attempt would only seem to hamper the proficiency of mother tongue. This thus involves a thorough examination of variations that can be deemed to be implemented through written language. Accepting the fact that such a move would take time, the scope of immediate changes seems far-fetched. However, by setting aside the phonological, morphological and syntactic variations (as these often do not go beyond the boundaries of comprehension and speaking into writing), importance can be given to the lexical variations that exist in the language. Such a move would only strength the language and continue to enrich the lexical resources of the language.

4. Objectives

The following objectives were formulated and a study was conducted to address the same.

1. Is there an awareness of dialectal variations specifically with respect to the lexicon of the language?
2. What is the scope of the above said variations?

5. Methodology and Procedures

The study involved both quantitative and qualitative approach. The quantitative analysis helps in generalizing the data based on statistics while the qualitative gathers in-depth information and uses words to describe the data. This mixed-method approach ensures the validity and reliability of the research study conducted.

A pilot study was designed to check the feasibility of conducting the study. Initially, the focus was given to assessing people from different regional dialects, however it was found to be not feasible as the same size would be exhaustive. Accordingly, it was decided that the participants would be from different educational backgrounds. This decision was found to be favourable over including people from different regional dialects and characterization on social lines. A list of target words (14 words) was created, taken from textbooks of upper primary and secondary classes (Kerala State Syllabus) for the questionnaire. For uniformity and to homogenize the list, all words belonged to the 'noun' category. The words included the names of fruits, vegetables and fish. For example, 'tapioca', 'papaya', 'bitter gourd', 'pomegranate', 'pineapple', 'sardine' and 'anchovy'. In the questionnaire, the participants were asked to write the first word- the word you know, the one spoken at home or the one they use commonly (could be English). In the second line they were asked to write all the words they know of the particular lexical item in the language. As dialectal variation can also be due to additional factors such as language contact and lexical borrowings, the words selected for the questionnaire were verified to be not affected by these factors.

The prepared questionnaire was given to 16 participants of the University of Hyderabad (UoH) based on convenience sampling and to homogenize the participants' exposure and environment. The participants of the study belonged to varying ages, between the ages 20-30. Out of the 16 participants, 9 were female participants and 7 were male participants. The participants of the study were grouped into three different categories. (1) Studying Integrated Degree at the UoH (1st and 2nd year- 18-21 years old) (2) Studying Master under the Integrated Degree programs at UoH (3rd and 4th year) or under the Master Program (22- 25

years old) (3) Studying Ph.D./ M.Phil. at UoH (2nd – 4th year) with prior education outside Kerala for at least three to four years (26- 29 years old).

The data was collected and analysis was done by categorizing the words they wrote. The phonetic transcription of each word was done to account for the phonological variations. However, the phonological variation isn't taken into account as the study focused on the lexicon of the language. Frequency of each word was noted with respect to the four categories mentioned above.

6. Results and Discussion

The data of the questionnaire is provided in the appendix B. For the purpose of discussion, the different dialectal variation of the lexicon is provided with the percentage of use in each category across participants in Table 1.

Table 1: Words with dialectal variation and its percentage of use in each category and in total

Variation number	Word	Category 1 (5 participants) %	Category 2 (5 participants) %	Category 3 (6 participants) %	Total number (16 participants) %
Tapioca					
1.	*kappa*	100	100	100	100
2.	*pu:ɭa*	40	20	66.66	43.75
3.	*maracci:ni*	40	0	66.66	37.5
4.	*cci:ni*	20	20	33.33	25
5.	*koɭɭi*	0	20	33.33	18.75
6.	*kazagu*	0	20	0	6.25
Papaya					
1.	*omakkayə*	80	0	33.33	37.5
2.	*kappaɭaŋa*	80	60	66.66	68.75
3.	*papaya*	20	20	66.66	37.5
4.	*kappaŋa*	20	20	66.66	37.5
5.	*karmu:sa*	40	20	33.33	31.25
6.	*pappaŋa*	0	0	16.66	6.25
7.	*karu:tta*	0	20	0	6.25
8.	*kappakkyə*	0	0	33.33	12.5
9.	*pappakkyə*	0	20	16.33	12.5
Passion fruit					
1.	*pa:san pruʈʈə*	80	100	100	93.75
Pomelo fruit					
1.	*kambilina:raŋa*	40	0	83.33	43.75
2.	*bablo:sna:raŋa*	20	0	66.66	31.25
3.	*bamblimo:sə*	40	0	16.66	18.75
4.	*kamblo:sna:raŋa*	0	20	0	6.25
5.	*na:raŋa*	0	0	16.66	6.25
Pineapple					
1.	*paina:ppiɭ*	40	40	83.33	56.25

No.	Term				
2.	*kaitaccakka*	80	80	83.33	81.25
3.	*pritticcakka*	20	0	0	6.25
4.	*kanna:raccakka/ anna:raccakka*	20	0	33.33	18.75
Bitter gourd					
1.	*pa:vakkə*	100	60	66.66	75
2.	*kaippakkə*	60	80	100	81.25
Custard apple					
1.	*kastta:rd a:ppiḷ*	20	40	16.66	25
2.	*a:ttaccakka*	60	0	83.33	50
3.	*a:ttakka/a:ttakya*	20	0	33.33	18.75
4.	*si:ttapazam*	0	40	83.33	43.75
5.	*si:ttaphaḷ*	0	40	0	12.5
Pomegranate					
1.	*po:migranaitə*	20	80	16.66	37.5
2.	*ma:ttalana:raŋa/ ma:ttalana:rakam*	80	20	100	68.75
3.	*anna:r*	20	40	16.66	25
4.	*uruma:baẓam*	20	20	16.66	18.75
Banana stem					
1.	*va:za:piɳʈi*	100	100	100	100
2.	*unnipiɳʈi*	20	20	0	12.5
3.	*va:za:ttaɳʈə*	0	0	33.33	12.5
4.	*piɳʈi*	0	0	33.33	12.5
Guava					
1.	*pe:raykka*	80	100	100	93.75
2.	*kaiykka*	20	20	16.66	18.75
3.	*aʈyka:pazam*	0	20	16.66	12.5
Cashew					
1.	*ka:suma:ŋa*	40	20	33.33	31.25
2.	*ka:suvaɳʈi*	60	40	83.33	62.5
3.	*aɳʈiparippə*	20	60	16.66	31.25
4.	*parakkima:ŋa*	0	40	50	31.25
5.	*paraŋiaɳʈi*	0	0	16.66	6.25
Anchovy					
1.	*nato:li/neto:li*	60	20	66.66	50
2.	*pi:rami:n*	20	0	0	6.25
3.	*bato:ḷ/ vato:ḷ*	20	20	16.66	18.75
4.	*ozukaḷ*	40	0	0	12.5
5.	*kozuva:*	20	20	50	31.25
6.	*onakkami:n*	-	20	0	6.25
7.	*velu:ri*	-	20	0	6.25
8.	*paralə*	-	0	16.66	6.25
9.	*nakkə*	-	0	16.66	6.25
Pink Perch fish					

1.	*kilimi:n*	80	60	83.33	75
2.	*puyya:plako:ra*	60	20	33.33	37.5
3.	*sakkara*	20	0	0	6.25
4.	*cemballi*	20	0	16.66	12.5
5.	*ma:ŋako:ra*	-	20	0	6.25
6.	*lis*	-	0	16.66	6.25
Sardine					
1.	*matti*	100	100	100	100
2.	*ca:la*	60	40	83.33	62.5

Source: Questionnaire Data

From the questionnaire data, the percentage of dialectal variation words of the lexical item is plotted against each participant. (Figure 1).
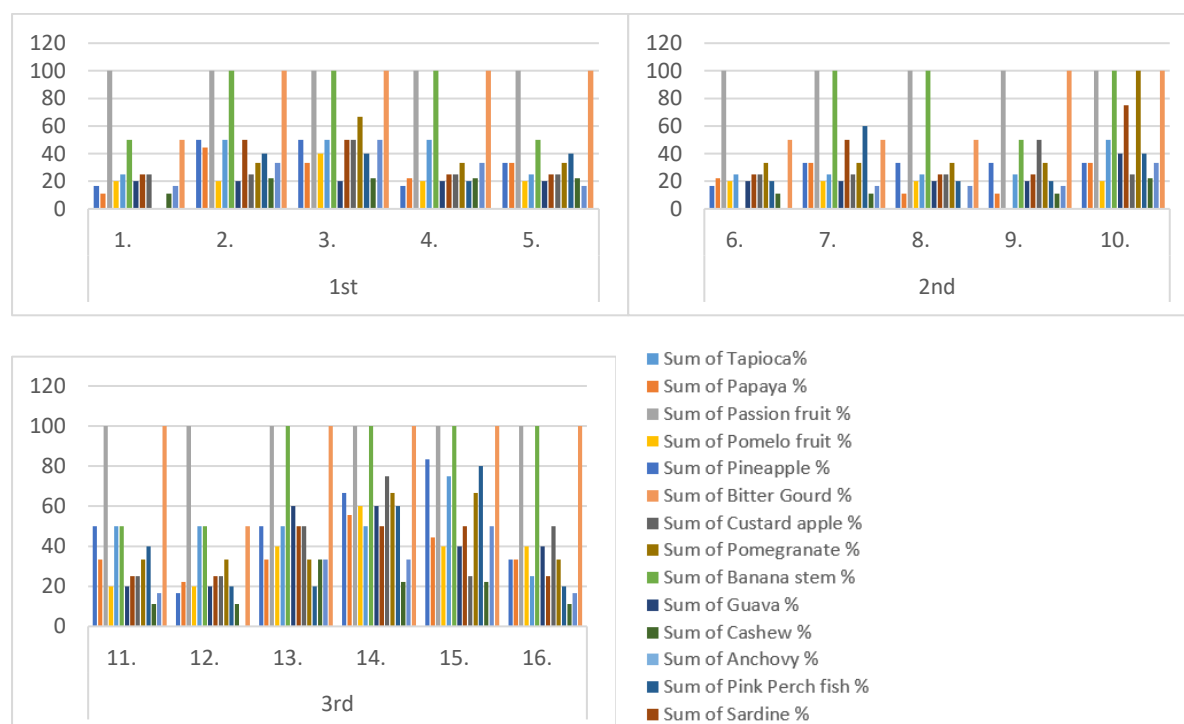

Figure 1. Pivot chart of percentage of dialectal variation lexical items against each participant in different category

From the questionnaire data (Appendix B), it is evident that the category 3 participants knew more of the dialectal variation lexical items when analysed against category 1 and category 2 participants (Figure 1). The data reveals the increasing use of English words. For example, the use of the word 'passion fruit', 'pineapple' and 'pomegranate' in place of its Malayalam counterparts. In fact, the fruit 'passion fruit' has a Malayalam word- *mu:si:liŋa:*. But this usage was not known to any one of the participants. This fruit also has other Malayalam words, *mu:solikyə* and *vallina:raŋa.* For the word 'pineapple', though the Malayalam words *kaitaccakka* and *kanna:raccakka/ anna:raccakka* were given as answers, 6 participants provided pineapple as the first word. Only one participant knew the word '*pritticcakka'*. Also, nobody knew the Malayalam '*parakkiccakka'*. The same can be said of the word,

'papaya', 'sardine' and 'guava'. Nobody knew the words, *kappara*, *kapparaykka:* (for papaya), *cuvappuratnam* (for sardine), *poyyappazam*, *koyya:kka* (for guava).

The only word that almost all the participants were aware of the presence of linguistic variation was 'tapioca'. This can be credited to the fact that tapioca curry is one among the main dish of Kerala. In case of the word 'papaya', the frequency of Malayalam dialectal variation words was less. Only one participant knew the word *karu:tta*. Also, in case of the word 'anchovy', the nine dialectal variation words had a skewed distribution. Five of the dialectal variation words were known only by 1 participant in category 2 and 3. The same can be said to be the case for the dialectal variation words of 'Pink Perch fish'. Three of the words, *sakkara, ma:ŋako:ra, lis* was also known only by 1 participant. These are some of the examples that were observed from the pilot study. Overall, there were very few participants who knew almost all the dialectal variation words of the lexical item. There were only three dialectal variation words that were known by three participants of which, one was 'passion fruit' for which the English word was used.

In the first category, one participant was found to know more dialectal variation lexicons when compared to the other participants in the same category. On detailed inspection it was seen that the participant had travelled to different places inside Kerala (different districts) on account of parent's occupation. This explains the participant's better awareness of the different lexicons as the participant was exposed to the different lexicons in his social environment. This shows how the lexicon variations have presently just become regional lexical items and is slowly disappearing from the Malayalam lexicon. The results also showed that the lexical variations were not due to different word formation processes. Rather, the lexical items were a result of the different dialect areas and are arbitrary.

With even one generation of speakers not speaking the words, it can be rightly said that the language has lost specific words existing in the original lexical reservoir of language. As discussed earlier with the example of the Romani dialects (Matras, 2010), the language continued to have a special linguistic repertoire but in comparison a depleted repertoire on account of the increasing use of English language. This is why the KCF 2007 move to create opportunities for learning mother tongue is significant. Making Malayalam mandatory would also go a long way in warranting the survival of Malayalam words to the next generation.

Additionally, from the results it should be noted that certain participants who spent a greater number of years at the University of Hyderabad had a much better knowledge of the different lexicons. This can be explained with regards to the exposure to other dialects, personal interaction, media and age group. Social media, movies and certain YouTube channels are trying to highlight and incorporate the dialectal variations in speaking. Though initial attempts were to serve humour, at present it serves as a medium to assert one's identity. This can be observed in several Malayalam movies where actors and actress take up speaking with distinct pronunciation and vocabulary to highlight where the characters are from[3]. The same can be said of many YouTube channels[4] too. One can also find the different dialects in the

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[3]Mammotty from Kerala has handled various dialects in different movies. To name a few, Kottayam dialect in movies such as Nazrani; Alappuzha dialect in Kazhcha, Trivandrum dialect in Rajamanikyam, Kozhikkode dialect in Valeri Mankyam, Idukki dialect in Loudspeaker, Thrissur dialect in Pranchiyettan and the Saint, Malappuram dialect in Bavoottiyude Namathil and Kasargod dialect in Puthan Panam.

[4] YouTube channels such as 'We r a Sambhavam' that is spoken in Trivandrum dialect and 'Sulu and Dineshan' spoken in Kannur dialect.

literary genre. The 19th century novelists O. Chandu Menon and C. V. Raman Pillai made use of these dialectal variations through the use of different social, historical and culture aspects. These steps have gone a long way in revitalizing the dialectal variations and its use. Though however extensive this attempt has been, it does not entail a clear awareness of the terms. Especially to those who are not partakers of social media or movies. This is also true in case of rural areas where access to these is limited.

7. Conclusion and Suggestion

In light of the analysis of the study, it is evident that depletion in lexicon repertoire is serious in the long run for language existence. One important remedy is the official inclusion of dialectal variation in the textbooks. This inclusion can be in the form of footnotes, so that a student who comes across the particular word can be aware of the existence of its Malayalam counterparts. From detailed interviews, it was observed that some of the participants had no knowledge of the existence of particular words. Hence, an official inclusion of words accommodates the need to expose learners of mother tongue to the exhaustive lexical repertoire of the language. Such a move, I believe would go a long way in educating the present and upcoming learners of the many lexical variations existing in the dialects of the language alongside the already present word in textbooks. This would do away with the disproportionate representation of lexical variation and ensure linguistic equality between the dialects.

The new National Education Policy 2020 asserts the importance of mother tongue and the mandatory inclusion of the mother tongue in curriculum (NEP 2020, p. 13). However, not much has been said on the inclusion of regional dialects. In India, a land where many languages have several dialects it is only reasonable to account for regional variations in the textbooks.

Furthermore, future studies incorporating factors such as place of education (rural/urban), education of parents and school syllabus into the design and analysis of the study would strength the result and shed more light on the scope of linguistic variation among dialects. Also, it would be favorable to include more target words for an extensive analysis. One necessary category that needs further research is the study of kinship terms. As kinship terms are bound with both regional and social differences, this category is an excellent source in mapping a dialect geography that comprises regional, community and caste differences on a large scale. Such a step would help to enforce the richness, beauty and diversity of the language for the future generations and an effective growth of dialectal variations. Subsequent studies can be done on other languages to analyze the presence of dialectal variation and to ascertain the importance of the same.

Conflict of Interest

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