



## TELUGU LANGUAGE IN MASS MEDIA

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### ABSTRACT

The twentieth century saw scientific, technological and communication revolutions which transformed the modern world and the quality of life. Mass media, especially television, have contributed in making the world a global village. Television influences people in more than one way. It influences people in shaping their attitudes, their tastes, and their language too, as found by Stuart-Smith et al (2013). In this respect, the impact of television is more profound than that of the newspapers. The Telugu TV channels telecast a number of programmes catering to various sections of the society and use different varieties and registers of Telugu in these programmes. It is a common feature of any language that different contexts and different topics call for the use of different kinds of language ranging from formal to slang. Besides, it is quite common for educated people to use two different languages alternately in the same stretch of speech. This phenomenon, known as Code-mixing/ Code-switching is also very common in TV channels. This paper examines the use of Telugu in Telugu TV channels as observed in various programmes.

Key Words: mass media, television, code-mixing, code-switching, borrowing

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Mass media are a characteristic of the modern world. Communication of a wide variety of messages in large quantities at a faster pace to all corners is a characteristic of mass media. Gould and Kolb (1964:413) define mass media as 'all the impersonal means of communication by which visual and/or auditory messages are transmitted directly to audiences. Included among the mass media are television, radio, motion pictures, newspapers, magazines, books and bill boards'. While mass communication in the form of print media (newspapers, pamphlets, etc.) took a few centuries to develop, later developments in electronics accelerated mass communication so fast that it took only a few decades to progress from Morse code to

radio, to television, to computer, to internet, and to the social media.

As stated in Sarma (1980:21), media can perform three functions: firstly, although the media usually reinforces the existing attitudes, they also have the power of transforming the attitudes in the long run. Secondly, they have the capacity to modernize the society, educate the people. Thirdly, mass media can act as a powerful antidote for narrow prejudices like regionalism, religious bigotry and so on.

Mass media are very powerful in that they can define issues, put them to public debate, and focus public attention on them. Schramm (1973) says that mass media can confer status on the

people who are inside them and also on those people who get a publicity from the mass media, and that mass media can enforce social norms in that people in general are not only motivated by what they see/ read in mass media, but are also influenced by them in their belief systems, arguments, world view and even their language. More than the print media, it is the electronic media, and especially the television channels that shape the beliefs and the language of common people. The reasons for such a heavy influence are obvious. Newspapers allow the readers time to reflect and reconsider, whereas television leaves a much deeper impact on the minds of the viewers such that there is no time to reflect. What is seen on the screen has a greater impact than what is read on a printed page. Moreover, newspapers report news of yesterday, while television can telecast live transmission. More significantly, television viewership requires no literacy. For all these reasons, the impact of television on the society is far greater than that of newspapers.

Newspapers, being a print medium, are constrained by certain conventions of what can appear in print and also by certain conventions of writing style. It would be more difficult for them to imitate the spoken style of people beyond certain limits. Television, being a visual medium, is not constrained by the conventions of writing and is relatively freer to try to approximate the spoken standard style of people to a greater extent. Marshall and Werndly (2002: 61) say, 'Television is a medium organized around the rhythms of speech, not writing, and around accompanying visual signification such as the gesture, appearance, and demeanour of speakers'. Understandably, there are, two tendencies on the part of the television medium: first, it shows slang words, and second, it shows the dialect of the programme presenters, anchors and participants. Thus, the language of television departs from that of newspapers in showing a greater number of slang words and in allowing a greater amount of participation for the various regional dialects.

We may compare the scenario of language use in Telugu television with that of BBC. Marshall and Werndly (2002: 74) say, 'Since RP and Standard

English are the accent and dialect associated with authority and power, you will have found that it is most likely to be used by news readers, and for voice-overs in current affairs programmes and documentaries. On the other hand, regional accents and dialects will be used in less 'serious' texts.' Acknowledging, however, that there is a trend towards using regional accents in more serious programmes, they make it clear that Standard English is used even in such situations and summarize 'We hear presenters with a variety of regional accents on other television programmes but we less often hear non- standard dialects being spoken'. It is clear that Telugu television differs from BBC in allowing not only regional accents but also regional words and slang words to be used even in news bulletins and magazine programmes. In addition, since most of the anchors and news readers are very familiar with English, they do a great deal of code-mixing and code-switching between English and Telugu. English is firmly rooted in the communication repertoire and speech patterns of all educated Indians. It is just unthinkable that an educated Indian speaks in chaste Telugu without mixing English in informal context. This mixing may take place either at the word level or at the sentence level. If it happens at the word level, it is called Code-Mixing and if it happens at the sentence level, it is called Code-Switching. These two phenomena are quite extensively seen in TV channels and an attempt is made in this paper to study the patterns of language use in Telugu TV channels.

For the purposes of this paper, we deal with the language patterns of Telugu TV channels under the following heads. All the examples have been taken from various programmes ranging from cookery shows to devotional programmes of various Telugu channels, which are more elaborately and more exhaustively dealt with in the forthcoming doctoral thesis of the first author.

**1. Pronunciation:** A number of changes in pronunciation seem to be in the offing in Telugu TV channels. This probably reflects the changing pronunciation habits in the younger generation. Some such patterns are given below.

a. Telugu, like the other Dravidian languages, makes a distinction between the alveolar lateral and the retroflex lateral. The prevailing trend among the younger generation in both the Telugu speaking states is to substitute the alveolar lateral for the retroflex lateral. Though the retroflex lateral has not been entirely lost, it can be stated that it is certainly on the decline and on the way out among the younger generation. This trend may be noticed even in the Telugu movies, which probably provides an impetus to the change and accelerates it. Understandably, the growing trend even in the TV channels is substituting the retroflex lateral with the alveolar lateral. Though a sweeping statement cannot be made, a number of TV anchors, if not all, show this pronunciation change. That this is a trend among the younger generation is proved by the fact that the participants in Telugu devotional programmes, who are of older generation, do not show this pronunciation change.

e.g. *peLLi* 'marriage' → *PELLi*  
*kaLLu* 'eyes' → *KaLLu*

b. Similarly, the voiceless palatal sibilant /ś/, as it occurs in words like *pariśodhana* 'research' is also on the decline in the speech of the younger generation. Influenced by English and Hindi, many of them are substituting this sibilant with the retroflex sibilant /ʃ/, as it occurs in words like *viśam* 'poison'. No wonder this too can be noticed in TV channels.

c. The word initial /w/ is lost before front vowels like /i/, /i:/, /e/, /e:/ in the speech of the uneducated people. There is an increasing trend to imitate this pattern even in the speech of the educated people, which is popularized by the Telugu movies on the pretext of being closer to real life. Surprisingly, this trend is seen almost everywhere and also in the TV channels, especially in the casual conversation. Again in careful speech and in devotional programmes this change is not seen.

e.g. *veLLu* 'to go' → *ellu* (/L/ changes to /l/)  
*va:Du* 'he' → *a:Du* (A movie title – *a:Do: rakam i:Do: rakam* 'that man is of one type, this man is of another type)

**2. Use of slang words:** Another trend, which has been popularized by movies and increasingly seen in the speech of many people, is the use of slang words irrespective of the context or situation.

The use of slang is not generally considered to be part of the standard variety in any language, for the reason that standard variety is mostly a matter of public usage and a feature of a formal occasion. In other words, on formal occasions languages tend to use standard varieties and in informal situations tend to use casual speech, which may include slang words. The growing trend, both in the society and in the TV channels, is to use slang words everywhere, unmindful of the situation.

e.g. From an interview with a film person:

*amma: ne:nu ra:nu vaste: tokkuDe:*

mother(excl)- I won't come, if I come  
trampling(slang word)

**3. Use of Urdu words:** A characteristic feature of Telugu TV channels is the excessive use of Urdu words. The use of Urdu words in casual conversation is quite common in Hyderabad, but many of such words are not in use, and hence, not comprehensible in the other regions of the Telugu speaking states. Some such words are given below.

e.g. *numa:yish* 'exhibition'  
*nazar* 'sight/ focus'  
*halcal* 'commotion'

**4. Code-mixing/ Code-switching:** In the contemporary Telugu society, it is quite common for

the educated people in all regions of the two Telugu speaking states to code-mix/ code-switch with English. But code-mixing with Urdu is a characteristic feature of the variety of Telugu spoken in Hyderabad. On TV channels too, this phenomenon is frequently noticed. This is especially seen in the scrolling news that appear on television screens and also as headlines of important news.

e.g. *khe:l khatam duka:N band* 'game ended- shop closed'

*numa:yish ka: jo:S*

'exhibition's enthusiasm'

*border lo: bandu:kula mo:ta* 'the noise of guns at the border'

**5. Use of creative compounds:** Journalists in mass media and in TV channels have a penchant for the creation of creative compounds and nonce formations. Some of these compounds sound very

poetic and highly imaginative. Some examples are given below.

e.g. *bhi:Sma:graham* 'anger of Bhisma' (used with reference to L.K. Adwani) *haDa:vuDi anta: kulase:nalade:* 'all the clamour is that of caste groups' *pasupu-kumkuma* 'turmeric and vermilion' (refers to the alliance between Telugu Desam and BJP)

To conclude, the television channels use a variety of language which is neither wholly representative of a particular region nor completely the standard variety as used in standard literary works. Being a spoken medium, television uses a language that is full of colloquialisms and slang but also employs a lot of code-mixing and code-switching.

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