

Relevance of Mahaprana in Speech Therapeutics*

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Speech and language rehabilitation of the speech handicapped insists on simple language (language with less redundancy). It is found that people are unaware of mahapranas which are presumably present in Kannada languages. To test this hypothesis, the occurrence of mahapranas in dictation, identification, repetition and discrimination of ability of a sample from the population was investigated.

Spectrographic differences between natural words with mahapranas and a few contrasting natural words with alpaprana and a few contrasting artificial words with alpaprana (since the contrasting natural words were not present) were investigated.

The spectrographic differences between mahapranas, alpaprana and alpaprana plus [h] were also investigated to study the controversy regarding them.

Since the present study was the first of its kind, a test was constructed with the help of lists of words containing mahapranas, lists of proverbs containing mahapranas; story books, novels and weekly magazines.

The purpose of the study was :

- (i) To test the awareness of mahapranas in the non-Sanskrit knowing native speakers of Kannada.

- (ii) To study whether there is any relationship between the caste and the awareness of mahapranas.

- (iii) To study whether there is any relationship between the social habits (like acting in drama and/or practising music) and the awareness of mahapranas.

It was hypothesised that :

- (i) The native speakers of Kannada, who are not exposed to Sanskrit language are not able to make out the difference between mahapranas and alpaprana in recognizing and in reproducing the same.

- (ii) Socio-economic status and caste do not play a significant role in the awareness of mahapranas.

Two passages, three sentence lists and four word-lists were prepared using mahapranas. The test materials and the instructions were recorded.

The test was administered to three social groups : Brahmins, touchable non-Brahmins and untouchable non-Brahmins, who fulfilled the following criteria :

- (1) Individuals with normal hearing.

- (2) Whose age was between 15 and 23 years.

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- (3) Basic education has SSLC (who had completed high school career).
- (4) Non-Sanskrit students.
- (5) Native of Mysore District or the neighbouring district.
- (6) Who is studying in Mysore at least for the past three years.

All the subjects had normal hearing. The test required the subject to write identify the sounds by marking (✓), repeat the words heard and to discriminate the sounds heard by marking (✓). The responses were scored comparing it with the leading text used.

The subject's oral responses to the repetition test were recorded and evaluated by two non-Kannada knowing, trained phoneticians. Mahapranas were present in their language in a natural way.

The performance of the groups on different methods were compared.

It was found that people were not aware of mahapranas. However the discrimination ability was good in a binary choice situation with orthographic clues. Statistically significant differences were not noticed in performances between the groups on different methods and between the performance of the corpus and the individuals who claimed that they acted in dramas and also those individuals who claimed that they practised music. Thus the hypothesis that :

- (i) The native speakers of Kannada, who are not exposed to Sanskrit language, are not able to make out the differences between mahapranas and alpaprana in recognizing and even reproducing the same.

- (ii) Socio-economic status and caste do not play a significant role in the awareness of mahapranas, were retained.

The present study contradicts Bright's (1960) observation that aspirates are present in Brahmins speech and are absent in non-Brahmins.

Spectrographic studies indicated that mahapranas (aspirates), alpaprana (unaspirates) and alpaprana plus [h] are different. Acoustically alpaprana plus [h] cannot be treated as mahapranas and a mahaprana could be treated as a unit phenomenon and not as composed of alpaprana plus [h]. Though the aspiration part of aspirate resembles [h] elsewhere initially, medially and in sequence after unaspirated consonants it cannot be treated as [h] because : (i) it is of shorter duration ; (ii) it follows the burst of preceding sounds and (iii) determines the duration of the following long vowels. Thus the aspirates as unit phonemes support Nayak's (1967) stand and contradict Bright's (1960) point of view that since there is no phonemic contrast of aspirated consonant and consonant plus [h], there seemed to be no reason to set up additional aspirate phonemes.

The following observations were made regarding the performance on the test :

- (1) One subject from Vidyaa Peetha could secure 95% on each method.
- (2) One subject, a daughter of a Priest, said in the beginning of the test itself that the test was on mahaprana. Her performance was good on repetition test and was satisfactory in other methods.

(3) A few subjects discriminated the differences between [j] and [j^h] but they did not know how to write [j^h].

(4) Śvasa (breath) of mahaprana (aspiration) was indiscriminately shifted to the preceding and following syllables of mahaprana in the word. There were a few incidents where the aspiration was shifted beyond two syllables.

Since the observations 1 and 2 were made on isolated individuals, a generalisation cannot be made. The exact order in which the shifting of mahapranas takes place could not be found out at this stage. The reason for the shift also could not be given. At this stage, it could only be generalised that the native speakers of Kannada, with the qualifications set up in the hypothesis, do not use the aspirates at appropriate places. The indiscriminate use

of aspirates hence leads us to feel that they are on the verge of extinction.

Limitations of the Study

- (1) Study is limited to the Mysore City.
- (2) It is applicable to the age range 15-23 years.

Implications of the Study

- (1) If teaching of mahapranas is insisted in speech rehabilitation, spectrographs could be used as a visual aid, to show the visible differences between the unaspirates, aspirates and unaspirated + [h].
- (2) It was found out that the present generation (15-23 years of age) was not aware of mahaprana. Since mahapranas were absent in the normal languages teaching mahapranas thus need not be emphasised in the speech rehabilitation programmes.