

Language Shift and Maintenance: A Case Study of the Telugu Community in Bagan Datoh, Perak (Malaysia)

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Abstract

Telugu is an official language, commonly spoken in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, India. Despite being one of the largest languages in the world, it is a minority language in Malaysia. Majority of the Telugus who migrated, settled in the plantation estates i.e Bagan Datoh, Perak (known as a Telugu heritage site). This study employs domain analysis to find out language choice in home, social, entertainment, religious and official domains among the younger and older generation as well as their language attitude. This study uses mixed methods. Questionnaire surveys were accompanied by interviews and focus groups discussions. Language shift is observed in literacy but being revitalized among the youngest generation. In spoken language, Telugu is well maintained especially in the home domain, coexisting with other languages in a diglossic relationship. Positive attitude towards mother tongue and revitalization endeavors demonstrate a favorable influence on the maintenance of the Telugu language in Bagan Datoh.

Keywords: minority language, Telugu language, Malaysian Telugu, language shift and maintenance, language vitality

1. Introduction

Telugu Language is a South-Central Dravidian language from the Proto-Dravidian family native to India. Telugu language hails from Andhra Pradesh, India (now known as Andhra Pradesh and Telangana). Telugu is spoken in India as well as around the world due to migration such as in the United States, the United Kingdom, South Africa, Mauritius, Malaysia, Singapore and Fiji (Kuncha & Bathula, 2004). Indians in general make up 6.6% of the total 30.2 million citizens of Malaysia and Telugus are a sub-minority group of Indians with own distinctive language, writing system and culture like the Malayalees, Punjabis and Gujuratis (Current Population Estimates, Malaysia, 2022). Although there has always been a controversy on the census, Telugu Association of Malaysia (TAM) official website has stated that there are about 500, 000 Telugus in Malaysia. This is because many who identified themselves as Indians in the census were automatically counted as Tamils (Telugu Association of Malaysia, 2017).

The history of Telugus in Malaysia dates back to the 15th Century, where they came as traders. Parameswara, a notable person in Malaysian history; who is recorded to have discovered Malacca in 1402, is a Telugu prince from Palembang (Butha, 2010). However, the major migration began in the 19th century during the British colony. According to the President of TAM, Dr Achaiah Kumar Rao, “The first Telugus arrived in Penang and settled in Bagan Datoh, Perak. Today, they are scattered all across the country (mostly in Johor, Kedah, Negeri Sembilan, Pahang and Selangor) but the community in Bagan Datoh is still going strong. In fact, we consider it a Telugu heritage area!” (Lin, 2010). Thus, Bagan Datoh is chosen for the case study. Figures 1 and 2 show the location of Bagan Datoh (also known as Bagan Dato and Bagan Datuk district) in the map of Malaysia Peninsula. It is located in the southwest of Perak State.



Figure 1: Map of Perak located in Malaysia Peninsula

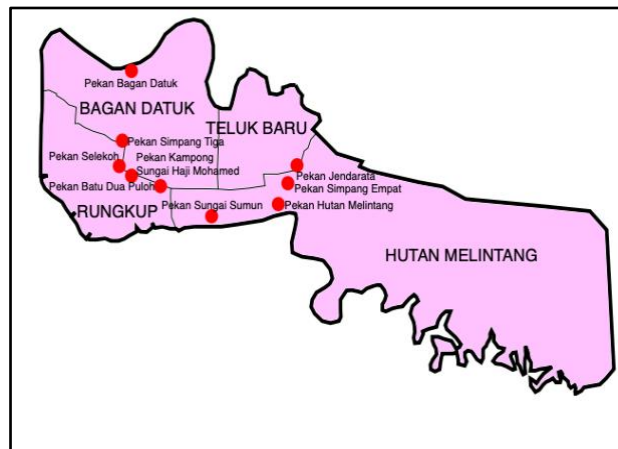


Figure 2: District of Bagan Datoh, Perak

Despite the large number of Telugus in Perak and Kedah, by the end of 20th Century many have migrated to the Klang Valley seeking employment and to improve the standard of living (Naidu, 2013). This explains the small number of participants in this study. Although many have moved to urban areas, they still return to their ancestors’ hometown as there is a strong sense of community, cultural and religious practices thus, making Bagan Datoh a well-known place for Telugu heritage. This study aims to examine the current language situation of the Bagan Datoh Telugu community amid many changes (i.e cessation of Telugu schools, availability of Telugu temples, major migration to the urban areas). In particular, it aims to determine language shift and maintenance in the community.

1.1 Objectives

The specific objectives of the study were to:

1. examine language choice of the Telugu community in selected domains
2. compare language use across age groups.
3. investigate the attitudes of the Telugu community towards Telugu and other languages in their linguistic repertoire

2. Literature Review

2.1 Language Shift and Maintenance

Fasold et al. (1987) describes language shift as a community abandoning a language in favor of another, while language maintenance involves a community continuing to use traditional languages. Furthermore, Fishman (1964), stated that when languages are in contact, the powerful language has a high tendency to either dominate or coexist with the other language and be used side by side in a diglossic relationship. In contrast, Sridhar (1992) says that "speakers of Indian languages tend to maintain their languages over generations and countries, even when they live away from the region where it is spoken" (Sridhar, 1992, p. 56-57)

Several studies on language shift and maintenance that have been conducted on sub-minority Indian groups in Malaysia, such as the Punjabi Sikh (David, Naji & Kaur, 2003), the Sindhi (David, 2006), the Malayalees (Nambiar, 2007), the Ceylonese (Navaneethachandran, 2011); show some form of language shift especially among the younger generation in urban settings. Similarly, a preliminary study conducted by Shanmuganathan (2010) on Telugu communities in Perak, Kedah and Johor shows a rapid language shift too. However, Gavarasana (2003) claims that the Telugu language is well and striving in Malaysia. Considering statements made by the scholars above, this study aims to focus on the language situation among the rural Telugu community in Bagan Datoh.

2.2 Domain Analysis

Fishman (1964) proposed domain analysis as a way to examine language choice. He defined domain as a socio-cultural construct that includes the topics of communication, the relationships between communicators, and the locales of communication. Fishman's approach to language

choice in a domain is based on the topics of discussion, the role relationships of the interlocutors, and the setting. (Fishman, 1972: 249).

Originally, there were five domains for language use derived by Fishman, Cooper and Ma - family, friendship, religion, employment, and education (Romaine, 1995: 30). Later scholars have added to the list of domains. However, the choice of domains is crucial for obtaining an accurate picture of language shift. In this study, home, social, religious, entertainment, and official domains were used. The family domain is important because it is known as a bastion of language maintenance whereas the social domain is crucial to examine the extent to which the ethnic language is maintained among community members and friends during socialization. The decline in the use of their mother tongue at home and between the community members in the social domain is indicative of language shift. (Sankar, 2004).

The religious domain includes the languages used in religious functions and worship, and it is often the last bastion of language survival (Gal, 1978). The entertainment domain shows language preference during leisure (watching movies, listening to songs, and reading magazines) and the official domain includes the languages used in official sectors such as work, school, or government offices.

2.3 Language Attitude

Attitudes have significant impact on language change and maintenance, and these attitudes are shaped by how a community perceives its own language. If a language is considered more desirable than the dominant language, the community tends to resist changes. For instance, the Tiwa Indians in Mexico value their Tiwa language as more beautiful than English, which contributes to the preservation of the language (Fasold, 1984). Similarly, in Canada, the French speakers exhibit resistance to language changes due to their nationalistic pride in their ethnic language, preferring to use English only when necessary (Lieberson, as cited in Fasold, 1984).

Kuncha and Bathula (2004) conducted a study on language attitudes within the Telugu immigrant community in New Zealand focusing on mothers and children. The research findings revealed that despite speaking Telugu at home and reporting positive attitudes towards Telugu, the children were experiencing language shifts. The contradictory viewpoints is mainly due to poor perception towards their mother tongue in comparison to English whereby the majority of them

find it unnecessary and a waste of time to learn Telugu. The decline is more apparent in reading and writing skills.

In a different study, Yusuf Nofal (2011) examined language attitudes among the Indian community in Yemen, focusing on language proficiency, language use contexts, attitudes towards each language, and factors influencing language maintenance or shift. The results showed that the Indians in Yemen actively maintain their ethnic languages, demonstrating a positive attitude towards their mother tongue. Marriages and close relationships were identified as significant factors contributing to language maintenance.

These findings raise a similar question about the language attitudes of rural Malaysian Telugus, and whether they also maintain or experience a shift from their mother tongue, similar to Telugu immigrants in New Zealand.

3. Methodology

This study uses both a quantitative and a qualitative approach. A quantitative approach was used through the administration of questionnaires on 62 Telugu participants who reside in Bagan Datoh. To further strengthen the findings, interviews were carried out with 2 TAM's representatives and focus group discussions were conducted with a group of 5 young adults and 5 older adults separately. Consent was taken before conducting the study by providing consent forms to the participants. As for the participants under the age of 18, consent was taken from their parents.

3.1 Instrumentation

3.1.1 Questionnaire

The study used a 3-part questionnaire that was adapted from Babu (2016). Part 1 gathered information about the participants' background and language proficiency, Part 2 focused on domain analysis, and Part 3 centered on language attitude towards Telugu.

3.1.2 Interviews

Interviews were conducted to gather information on the history of Malaysian Telugus, language use and repertoire, Telugu education, language attitude, language change, and challenges. The interviews provided insights into the current language situation of the Telugu community, which were triangulated with the other findings.

3.1.3 Focus group

Focus groups discussed language use in domains, linguistic repertoire, Telugu language proficiency and literacy, challenges of using Telugu, identity, and language attitude. This added a realistic perspective to the language situation of the community distinctive to the age groups.

3.1.4 Participants

Table 1 below shows the distribution of participants involved in the study- 62 Telugu participants who reside in Bagan Datoh, categorized into genders and four age groups. The chosen age groups are considered key developmental stages and generational cohorts (i.e teenagers, young adults, middle aged adults and seniors/retirees), ensuring comprehensive coverage of language variation and change across adulthood.

Table 1: Distribution of Participants According to the Age Group

Gender/Age	15-25	26-40	41-55	56 and above	Total
Male	2	3	6	17	28
Female	11	10	6	7	34
Total	13	13	12	24	62

As for religious beliefs, the majority of the Telugus are Vaishnavite, Hindus (72.6%) with a minority of Christians (27.4%). This is reflected from the Telugu temples around Bagan Datoh i.e Sri Venkateswara Devasthanumu and Sree Rama Temple as well as Christian Catholic Chapel (Our Lady of Fatima) in Bagan Datoh with a Telugu signage.

The education accessibility and policies in Malaysia have led to overall academic improvement among Malaysians, including the Telugu people in rural areas. Many younger people are now pursuing tertiary education instead of just primary education, in hopes of improving their living standards.

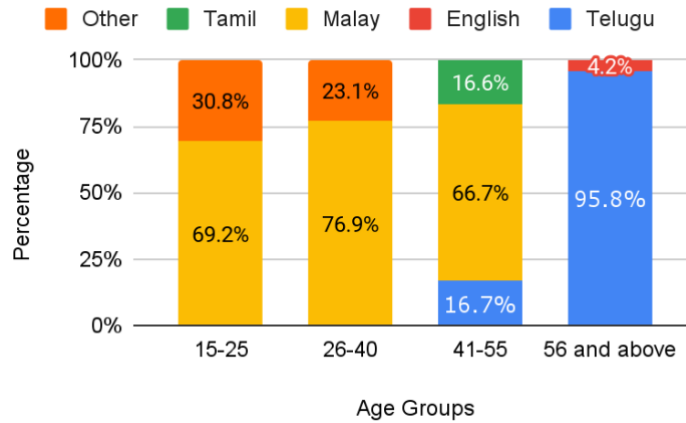


Figure 3: Types of Primary School Attended

Figure 3 shows the medium of instruction in primary schools attended by the participants. Only the primary schools data is shown here because it had a wider range of mediums of instruction in the past, unlike the current national educational system. In the past the vernacular schools included Telugu schools (Sekolah Kebangsaan Jenis Tamil/Telugu). Telugu schools faced several challenges such as shortage of teachers and students, location, lack of budget and the requirement of an additional year of schooling before entering secondary schools. This led to a rapid decline of Telugu Schools during the 1970’s with the last school being closed in 1990 (Bernama, 2018). As a result, the majority of participants above 56 years old attended Telugu schools, while younger participants attended Malay medium schools due to the education policy change. There were no records of younger participants attending Telugu medium schools since they ceased to exist in 1990. Furthermore, the data shows an increase in participants attending schools conducted in other mediums such as Mandarin among the age groups of 15-25 and 26-40.

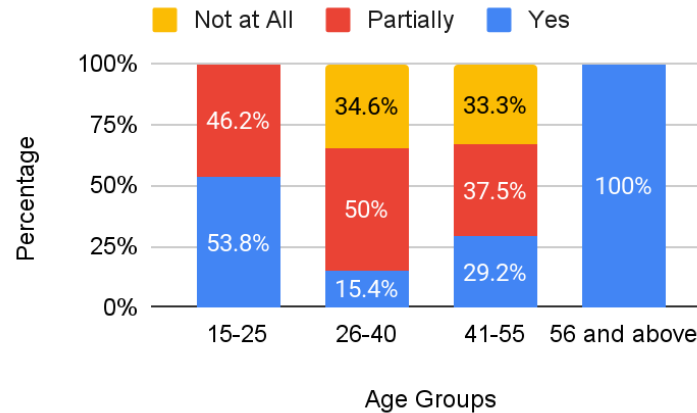


Figure 4: Ability to Read and Write Telugu

Figure 4 shows participants' ability to read and write Telugu. The data from Figure 4 shows that 100% of the older age group, 56 and above are Telugu literate compared to the age groups of 41-55 and 26-40 which records 29.2% and 15.4% respectively. This is due to the national education system's policy change, which deprived the community of formal Telugu education (refer to Figure 3). However, there is a rise in Telugu literacy among the age group of 15-25 (53.8%), which is attributed to the Telugu classes organized by TAM and the community's emphasis on Telugu literacy in Bagan Datoh.

In contrast, the comfortability of speaking Telugus shows a higher percentage among the community. Based on the data collected, 100% of the participants from the age group of 56 and above followed by 75%, 76.9% and 92.3% of the participants from the age groups of 41-55, 26-40 and 15-25 respectively have ranked Telugu as the most comfortable spoken language. Nevertheless, code switching, and mixing is inevitable in a multilingual society such as Malaysian Telugus. The number of participants who have reported to code switch and mix increases as the participants come from younger age groups except for the age group of 15-25 whereby it decreases. Majority of the participants code switch and mix with English followed by Malay and some with Tamil.

3.2 Data Collection Procedures

Questionnaires were distributed to 62 Telugu participants in Bagan Dato using a snowballing method of sampling. Physical distribution during the Covid-19 pandemic was not allowed due to

the movement restriction order, thus, Google survey forms were used. Google survey forms were distributed via electronic mediums such as Whatsapp, email and messenger. As for some older participants who were not technology savvy, they were contacted by telephone to answer the questionnaires. Consent acknowledgement was listed on the front page of the questionnaire before proceeding with the survey.

Interviews were conducted with 2 TAM representatives who were identified through the TAM webpage. Master Velaga Appanaidu Akiah, Interviewee 1 (I1) (former Bagan Datoh Chairman and English teacher who served as principal and taught Telugu classes. Currently the Principal for TAM Academy) and Master D.V Sree Ramulu, Interviewee 2 (I2) (TAM trustee and ex-Telugu school teacher and headmaster in Bagan Datoh). The Interviewer was labeled as (I). Due to pandemic and traveling restrictions, they were contacted by phone and the interview conversations were recorded through a phone call recorder application.

The focus group discussions were conducted with young adults (aged 15-30) and older adults (aged 41 and above) separately. The age groups were set based on Youth Societies and Youth Development Act (Amendment) 2019 (Act 668) and MyGovernment Portal (Yunus & Landau, 2019 ; The Elderly/Senior Citizens, n.d.). The participants were selected using a snowball sampling method. The first participant from the age group was identified and then snowballed into finding other participants. Each group consisted of 5 participants labeled as S1, S2, S3, S4, and S5 respectively and the moderator as (M). They were briefed on the procedures, rules and regulations, time, date, venue/ online platform and subject matter. Due to the Covid -19 pandemic, Whatsapp groups were created to assist in any communication and briefing prior to the focus group discussions. The discussions were conducted virtually via Zoom which lasted about an hour.

3.3 Data Analysis Procedures

The questionnaire's data were coded, analysed and interpreted using an Excel summary sheet. An illustration of percentages and frequencies of the figures were presented in table form followed by explanations and descriptions. Information obtained from the interviews and focus groups were transcribed/translated, analysed and explained.

4. Results and Discussion

This section presents findings on domain analysis and language attitude retrieved from Part 2 and Part 3 of the questionnaire respectively. Interviews and focus groups discussion excerpts are then used to triangulate the findings.

4.1 Language Use in Selected Domains Across Generations

Five domains will be discussed in this section which are home, social, religious, entertainment and official.

4.1.1 Home domain

Table 2: Distribution of participants from a mixed family and mixed marriages

Family Info/Age	15-25		26-40		41-55		56 and above	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Mixed Race								
Parents	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Married to a Non-								
Telugu	-	-	2	15.3	1	8.3	-	-
Not married	8	61.5	4	30.7	-	-	-	-

N: Number

% : Percentage

Family is known as the bastion of language preservation. Coluzzi et al. (2013) highlight factors such as endogamy, close knit social networks and heritage create a cultural gap with other linguistic groups, which contributes to the maintenance of a language. Thus, knowing the family marital dynamics can assist in understanding language use in the home domain. The table indicates that all participants come from Telugu families, but some in the age groups 26-40 and 41-55 have married non-Telugus (15.3% and 8.3%, respectively). Unmarried participants in the age groups of 15-25 (61.5%) and 26-40 (30.7%) suggest a potential increase in mixed marriages. Given the fact that Telugu is a minority language which is mainly used only in family context, mixed marriage may pose a challenge to mother tongue preservation.

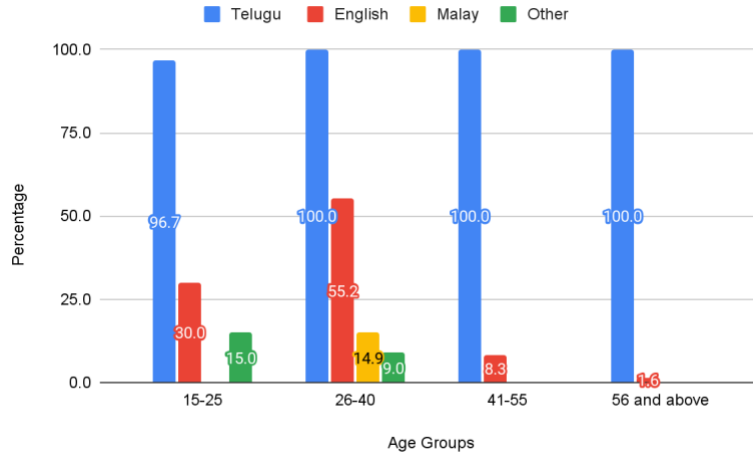


Figure 5: Language(s) Spoken to Family Members Across Age Groups

Figure 5 is a summary of language(s) spoken to family members such as grandparents, parents, siblings, relatives, children, and spouse/partner. This part of the questionnaire has enabled the participants to mark more than one language(s) as there is possibility of code switching and code mixing in Malaysian homes. Across all age groups, it can be seen that 100% of the participants have stated Telugu as the medium of interaction among family members with a small decline among the age group of 15-25 which records 96.7% of participants. As for the use of other languages, participants from the age groups of 26-40 show more prominently followed by the participants from the age groups of 15-25. The participants speak Telugu in combination with other languages i.e. English, Malay, and Other and do not exclusively speak one language, replacing Telugu. This is a common scenario especially among siblings, children, and spouses.

When asked about the first language spoken to parents, the majority of the participants report to primarily use their mother tongue. Telugu is the main language spoken at home, while some participants state that they use English too. Furthermore, when asked if the participants usually speak Telugu at home, all participants across age groups answered 'Yes'.

Extract 1: Interview with Interviewee 2 (I2)

I2 : *...Well, in my family we all speak in Telugu including with grandkids because there are no mixed marriages.. Even though they have moved to the city, KL, they still speak in Telugu.*

In Bagan Datoh even if they go to Chinese schools they rarely mix the language at home. They speak Telugu at home. Even if they go to Tamil school. Maybe one or two words out of habit they might but mostly use Telugu.

Based on Extract 1, the interviewee has mentioned that the household language generally is Telugu with some habitual code mixing.

Extract 2: Focus Group with Young Adults

S3: *Ok, mostly in our family, we speak in Telugu to our parents, siblings and relatives. Mostly, all are Telugus... Unlike my grandparents, I can't read and write in Telugu...*

S1: *...At home we all speak Chinese and Telugu.*

S2 & S5: *We are from Chinese school but we can speak, read and write Telugu very well.*

S4: *...Our major language is Telugu. Always speak Telugu to everybody. We don't have any other languages in our family. All of them are Telugus so we usually speak in Telugu. Basically we don't speak English or Bahasa like that...*

S5: *...with our relatives like our cousins, we speak Chinese, when adults are around, we speak English and Telugu....*

The above extract shows language(s) used in the home domain by the young adults. They have stated that they predominantly use Telugu with an exception of 3 participants who state Mandarin since they attend Chinese Schools. S3 and S4 state that they only speak Telugu at home as their family members are mostly Telugus. S1, S2 and S5 on the other hand speak Chinese, Telugu, and English at home. S5 states that they use Chinese with cousins but Telugu and English with adults. Despite that, they claim to be proficient not only in spoken Telugu but reading and

writing as well. This shows that Telugu is actively being used in the home context in various degrees perhaps due to the influence of schools they attend.

Extract 3: Focus Group - Older Adult

S2: At home it is only me and my wife, we only speak Telugu. Only when my grandchildren come we speak a little Malay but mostly Telugu. The small kids also speak English and Telugu when they are talking to each other...except for the youngest grandson. I speak English and Telugu because he is so used to it.

S3: We speak only in Telugu at home... but sometimes the kids argue in Mandarin...

M: How about text messaging or leaving notes for the family members? What language do you use?

S4: We use Malay or English.

S5: We use romanised Telugu when texting

S2: In English. Although I can write Telugu but feels easier to use English when text messaging.

Extract 3 presents a similar response as the young adults in Extract 2. They predominantly speak Telugu at home except for text messaging or leaving notes whereby Malay and English are used and one participant said romanised Telugu. This could be mainly because of the types of school they went to, making it more convenient and natural to write in Malay and English. Although they commonly converse in Telugu, S3 mentioned that the children in the house argue in Mandarin (Chinese dialect) as it seems natural to them because they go to Chinese School. S1 also mentioned that his youngest grandson seems to use more English.

In the spoken aspect, Telugu seems to be thriving in the home context despite the infiltration of other languages due to school influence. However, in the reading and writing aspect the above data show that Telugu shows a significant decline and revitalisation among the youngest participants (S1, S2 and S5)

4.1.2 Social domain

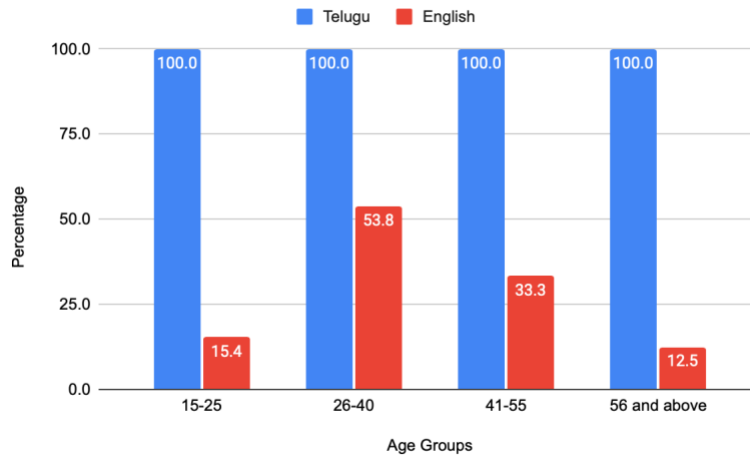


Figure 6: Language(s) used when talking to a fellow Telugu at social events

Figure 6 shows language(s) used when talking to a fellow Telugu at social events such as weddings, parties, and cultural ceremonies. All participants have reported to be using Telugu across all age groups. Nonetheless, some participants have also stated to be using English along with Telugu. The highest usage of English in addition to Telugu is reported among the age group of 26-40 which is 53.8% (N= 7).

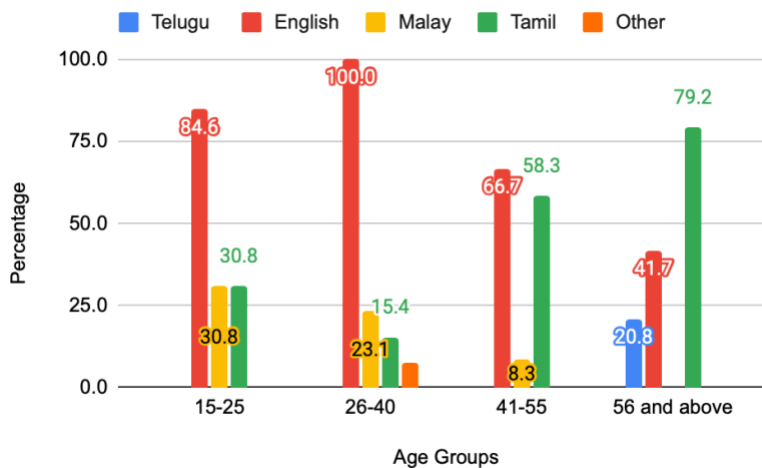


Figure 7: Language(s) Used when Talking to Indians of Other Origins at Social Events

Figure 7 shows language(s) used when conversing with Indians of other origins at social events. The most prominent language used among age groups of 15-25 and 26-40 is English with 84.6% (N=11) and 100% (N=13) participants respectively. Age groups of 41-55 have stated the usage of English and Tamil which is 66.7% (N=8) and 58.3% (N=7) participants. Age group 56 and above reports the highest usage of Tamil which is 79% (N=19) participants, followed by English with 41.7% (N=10) participants and interestingly 20.8% (N=5) participants have reported the usage of Telugu which is an uncommon scenario in Malaysia. This is because as Tamils are the largest Indian population in Malaysia, other sub-ethnic Indians usually use Tamil as the lingua franca and not Telugu.

Extract 4 : Focus Group with Young Adults

S5 : *...but for some Telugus we can't speak in Tamil. It's not respectful. If we are Telugus we normally speak in Telugu. If suddenly we see Tamils, we can't be speaking Telugu to them. We talk Tamil only to them.*

S1 & S5 : *In school, many Tamil people, not many Telugus. So, to Tamil people we speak in Tamil. To Malay people, we speak in Malay.*

S2: *I don't know Tamil, so to Tamil people I speak Malay.*

S1 : *We speak Tamil with friends only outside the class/school. But in school Malay only.*

Extract 5: Focus Group with Older Adults

S2 : *People start emphasizing Telugu because they start worrying about the loss of the language. So they started emphasizing not only at home but also to outsiders who are Telugu...*

S1: *Telugu is very important to us... we speak other languages too, for example, when we see a Malay, we speak in Malay, to a Tamil, we speak Tamil to an English man well my English is not that good. And to any Telugus outside home such as doctors in the hospital we speak and greet only in Telugu... I also can speak Tamil but people including my wife who went to Tamil school find the way I speak Tamil weird and incorrect.*

S4: *Mainly outside we speak in Malay, if it's a Tamil person, we speak Tamil ... depends on whom we are talking to.*

S2 *I was a headmaster, when meeting parents I accommodated them. Majority here if they come from the village, I speak to them in Malay. Depending on the education level. If the person is an educated Tamil, I usually speak in English but if not in Tamil.*

The above two extracts show how both the young and older adults utilize different language(s) when socialising. They seem to be adaptable and fluent multilingual speakers as they accommodate people of other languages. In cases when they are unable to converse in the other persons' language, Malay is used. It is important to note that they speak Malay in schools and this probably due to National School Policy whereby Malay is prioritized. Having said this, the older adults do emphasize on the awareness of their mother tongue more compared to the young adults. Despite the young and old being multilingual, Telugu seems to be maintained in the community as they still actively use Telugu when conversing to a fellow Telugu in a social context.

4.1.3 Religious domain

The religious demographic of the community comprising a majority of Vaishnavite Hindus and minority Christians relies heavily on the common language used in worship by the majority of the devotees. This in turn affects the language choice of the participants.

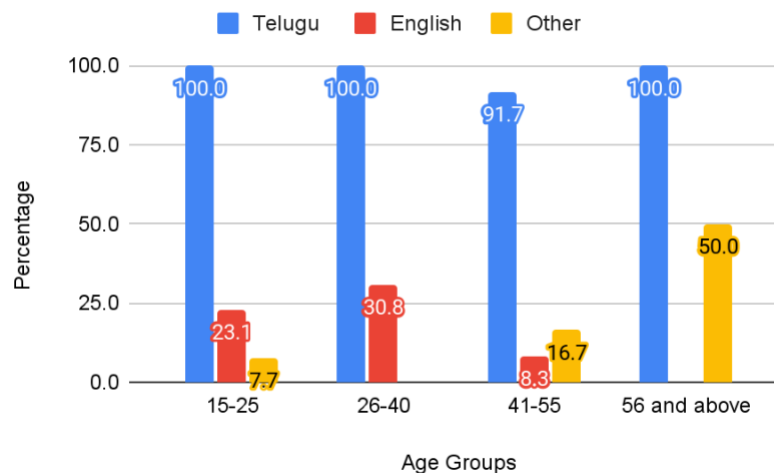


Figure 8: Language(s) Used When Saying Personal Prayers

Figure 8 shows language(s) used by the participants when saying personal prayers. Almost all participants across the age groups state that they say their personal prayers in Telugu. Few anomalies are the high usage of 'Other' language(s) (most probably Sanskrit) in the age group of

56 and above, a small dip in the age group of 41-55 in the number of participants who use Telugu and a rise in the usage of English in the age group of 26-40. Language(s) used in personal prayers is/are reflection to inner language and one’s linguistic identity. Despite the variant, Telugu remains the predominant language used in this setting.

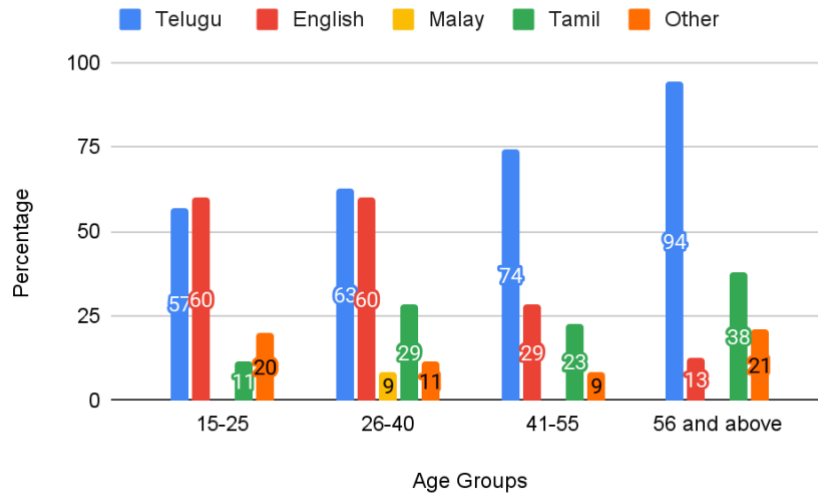


Figure 9: Language(s) Used in Religious Worship

The above data shows responses on language(s) used in worship i.e. listening to sermons, singing religious songs and reading religious materials. The percentage of participants who use Telugu increases from young to old. 57% of participants from the age group of 15-25 report to be using Telugu in worship, followed by 62%, 74% and 94% from the age groups of 26-40, 41-55 and 56 above respectively. As for the usage of English, participants from both the age groups of 15-25 and 26-40 show the highest usage (60%), followed by 29% and 13% for the age groups of 41-55 and 56 and above respectively.

Percentage of participants who use Tamil fluctuates across the age groups with the highest percentage (38%) from the age group of 56 and above and the lowest (11%) from the youngest age group 15-25. ‘Other’ language(s) shown in the figure, can be speculated to be ‘Sanskrit’ as the majority of the participants are Hindus. Hinduism uses Sanskrit for mantras and prayers. Malay can be an outlier response probably used in Christian churches as the churches in Malaysia do offer multilingual services/masses.

Extract 6: Interview with Interviewee 1 (I1)

I1 : Many temples in Bagan Datoh... So that is why the language is strongly rooted here...

... we do Ugadhi (Telugu New Year), we can have the function, so the parents got more liking to Telugu language ...

Extract 7: Interview with Interviewee 2 (I2)

I2 : ...In Bagan Datoh we speak a lot of Telugu in comparison to Telugus in KL. We have our religious/cultural celebration which we celebrate exclusively in our area temples.

Extract 8: Focus Group with Older Adults

S2: We speak only Telugu at home except when we gather for prayers, we use other languages. For example one of the kids will read the English Bible, another in Mandarin, I read Telugu and my wife in Tamil. Only during prayers we use these 4 languages other than that we use only Telugu ...

S3: ...In fact when we are saying prayers we say in Telugu but when reading the bible we read in different languages

S2 I use Telugu a lot but only when I go to church, I go to English mass ...

S1: ... we have several Telugu temples here for example in Bagan Datoh ...So people often go to these temples... and develop loyalty to the language and speak Telugu.

S2 Yes, they have bhajans and sing songs and other activities. These things inspire them

The above extracts indicate that Telugu language is used predominantly in worship except in some cases where the language is not accessible for example S2 and S3 say that although they say prayers in Telugu but when it comes to reading Bible or going to Mass, other languages are involved. This is mainly due to the unavailability of an exclusive Telugu church in Malaysia and

the dwindling proficiency of Telugu literacy. However as for Hindus, with the presence of Telugu temples in Bagan Datoh, Telugu is actively used. Many actively participate in the activities conducted in the Telugu temples which is an indication of language maintenance and preservation. If this continues, the usage of Telugu among the younger ones as seen in Figure 9 may improve.

4.1.4 Entertainment Domain

In the entertainment section, participants were asked about their preferred language(s) when engaging with mass media i.e when listening to songs, watching TV programmes and movies. It is important to note that the availability of local mass media in Telugu is limited in Malaysia. However, through the access of the internet, Telugu media from India is more accessible now.

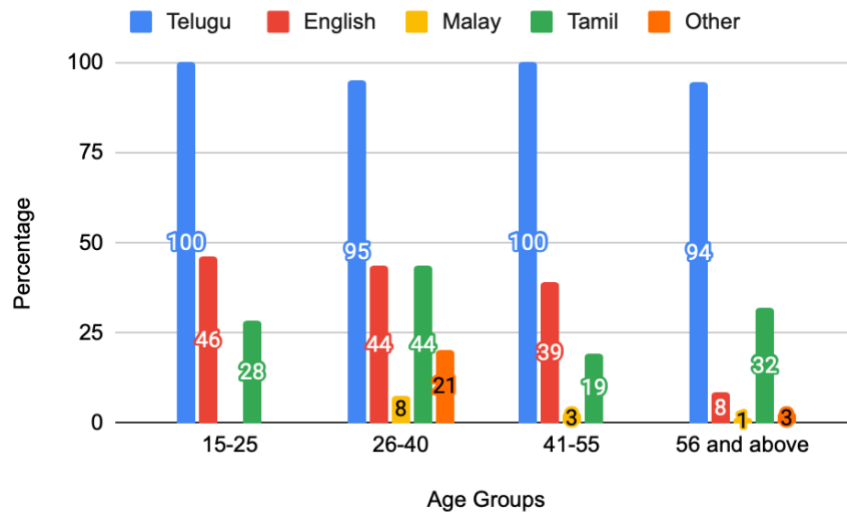


Figure 10: Language(s) used for entertainment

Based on Figure 10, the majority have stated to use Telugu across all age groups with a small decline in the age groups of 56 and above and 26-40. This could be because of the limited resources and availability of Telugu media for the older age group and as for the age group of 26-40 it could be because of the easier accessibility of media in other languages; or could simply mean an insignificant anomaly. The use of English increases as the participants come from younger age groups. Only 8% from the age group of 56 and above reported to use English in entertainment followed by a steep increase to 39% among the age group of 41-55, 44% and 46% among the age groups of 26-40 and 15-25 respectively. Another significant language used in entertainment is

Tamil, with the highest percentage of participants coming from the age group of 26-40. A small percentage of participants also have stated language(s) such as Malay and ‘Other’.

Extract 9: Interview with Interviewee 1 (I1)

*I1 : No doubt Telugu language is slightly polluted. Because of Tamil, English and Malay languages... And the media, ... mostly in Tamil, for example newspapers, radio, TV. So we mix with them, see them, then we forget Telugu and mix Tamil words. For example
Instead of saying “alphaharam” in Telugu for breakfast, people say ‘pasiara’ in Tamil. For the phrase ‘have you eaten?’, instead of saying ‘bojanam chesava’ in Telugu people say it ‘sudah makan kah’ (Malay), ‘makan saysava’ or ‘makan aiyanda’ (makan (Malay)=eat, saysava/ aiyanda (Telugu)= done)
We are not talking Telugu correctly. But now our grandchildren are going to Telugu schools, and our media is very good... We are learning more Telugu. Original words la now.*

Extract 10: Focus Group with Older Adults

S1: ...I read Malay newspapers ... TV I only watch in Telugu except sports channels, which will be in English.

S2: People start emphasizing Telugu because they start worrying about the loss of the language. Another effort taken by introducing Telugu TV channels (from India). Even in Astro (Malaysian Satellite TV company) they do not provide sufficient entertainment in Telugu but rather it is always in Tamil. Thus, the community has taken initiative to provide Telugu entertainment channels with the hope that Telugu doesn't die just like what happened to Telugu schools...

S2: Yes, the Telugu channels have encouraged and inspired the Telugus to continue using the language...

S4 because I went to Tamil school so when it comes to songs I use a lot of Tamil. In fact I used to love watching a lot of Tamil and Hindi movies but as soon as I came home we all spoke Telugu because both parents are Telugu. 20 years ago there weren't many Telugu movies so we watched what was available only.

Based on the interview excerpt, (I1) claims that many Telugus have been heavily influenced by the media and this is seen in the lexical borrowings and code mixing. An example which was given in the excerpt is pertaining to the lexical item for breakfast and the phrase ‘have you eaten?’. In the focus group discussion however, the speakers mention that they predominantly

use Telugu as it is more available now. In the past, it was more challenging to obtain Telugu entertainment, and S4 said they watched more Tamil and Hindi films. In order to preserve Telugu and foster love for their mother tongue, the community worked hard to bring in Satellite channels from India to promote Telugu entertainment. It can be deduced that Telugu language is being revitalized in the entertainment domain although the past effect (i.e change in lexical) may be irreversible.

4.1.5 Official Domain

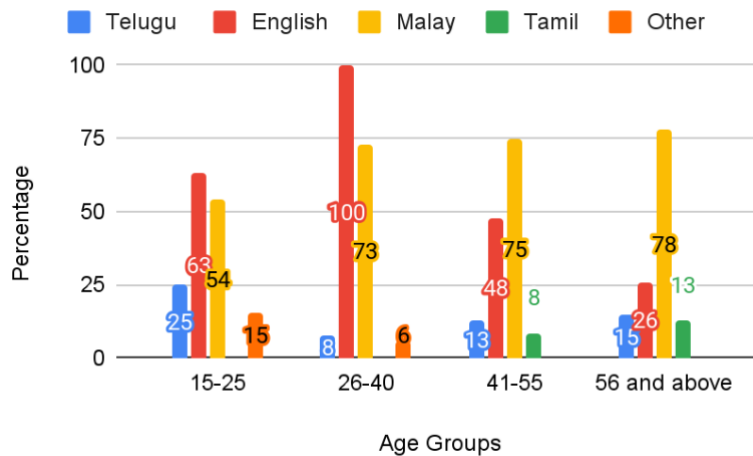


Figure 11: Language(s) used in official settings

Figure 11, shows that English is predominantly used by the age groups of 15-25 and 26-40. Whereas Malay is predominantly used by the older participants from the age groups of 41-55 and 56 and above to communicate with public officers. Other languages such as Tamil and ‘Other’ mark small percentages including Telugu. Telugu is reported across all age groups in small percentages but rising from the old to youngest age groups. This may be an indication of revitalisation among the young generation.

Extract 11: Focus Group with Older Adults

S1: Telugu is very important to us... we use it on a daily basis ... And to any Telugus outside home such as doctors in the hospital we speak and greet only in Telugu...

S2: *I was the headmaster... we accommodate them, police officers in Malay... Majority here, if they come from a village, speak to them in Malay. Depending on the education level and so on.*

Extract 11 highlights that the participants often accommodate to the languages spoken by the public officers and they do not hesitate to speak in Telugu to Telugu professionals. This simply shows that the Telugus are flexible and multilingual in this context.

4.2 Attitudes towards Telugu Language

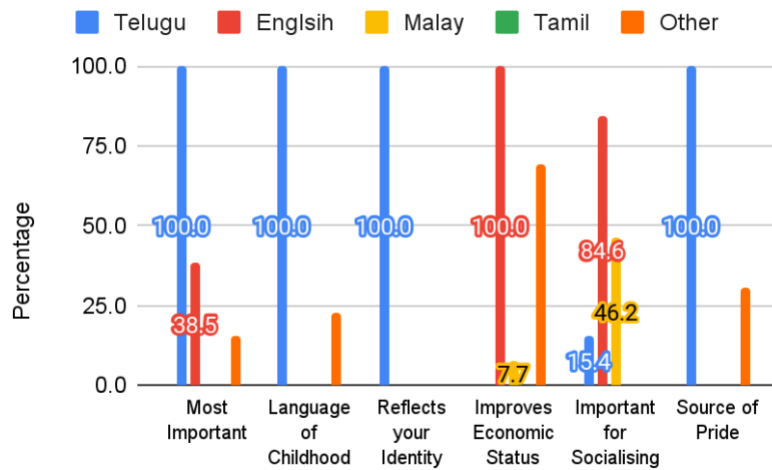


Figure 12: Language attitude for the age group of 15-25

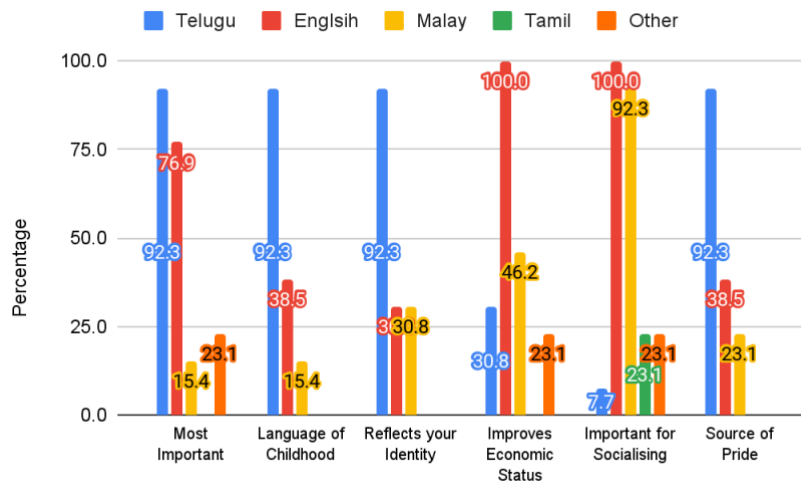


Figure 13: Language attitude for the age group of 26-40

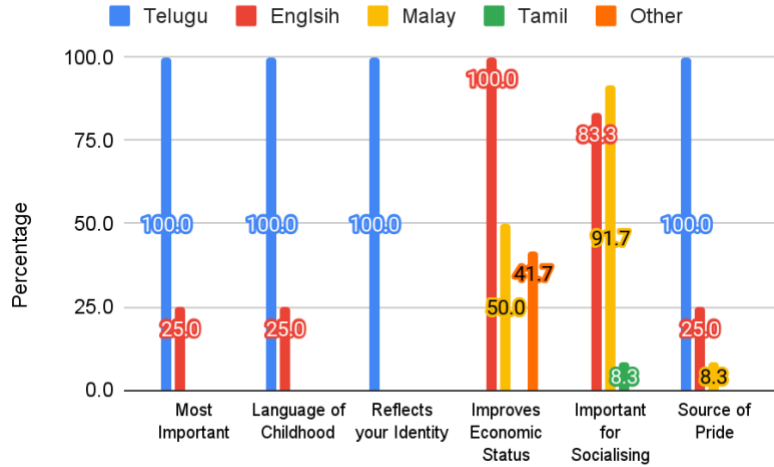


Figure 14: Language attitude for the age group of 41-55

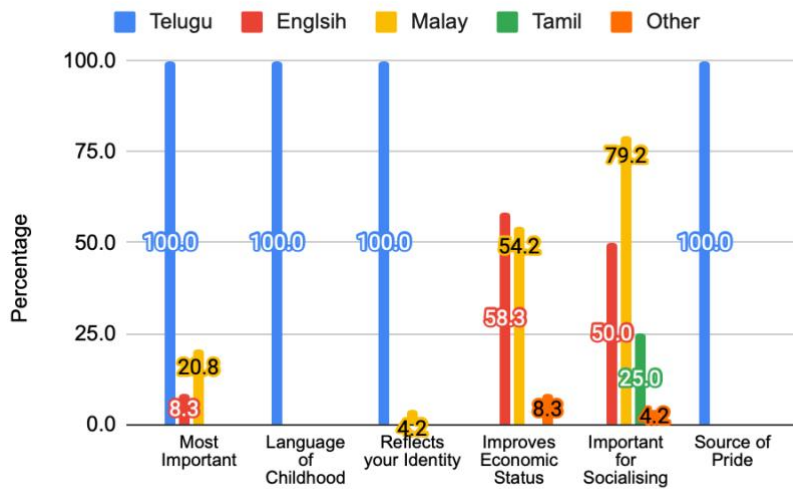


Figure 15: Language attitude for the age group of 56 and above

Based on Figures 12, 13, 14 & 15 on language attitude, almost all participants from all age groups state that Telugu to be most important, language of their childhood, reflection of their identity and source of their pride. Despite that, the influence of other languages i.e. English, Malay and ‘Other’ is also apparent among the younger participants especially the age group of 26-40. As for language(s) that improves economic status and is important for socialising, English and Malay are given more emphasis with a few stating Tamil, ‘Other’ and Telugu. The youngest (15-25) uses more English whereas the oldest (56 and above) use more Malay when socialising.

Almost all participants hold a high sense of pride towards Telugu and at the same time are aware of the importance of English and Malay for economy and socialising purposes. Despite the high sense of pride, the younger participants (especially from the age groups of 26-40) place a high importance on English. The focus group findings also show that the young adults have high regards to Telugu as it is given a great emphasis at home. Parents are said to be strict when it comes to speaking Telugu at home. In fact, non - Telugu spouses such as Chinese and Malay were all taught to speak Telugu by immediate and extended Telugu family members. Speaking to Telugu adults is perceived as being respectful in the community. However, in the aspect of job opportunity, the participants mentioned that their parents encourage the use of Mandarin and English. The older adults express their great love for Telugu. Despite being constantly exposed to many languages, they try their best to inculcate the love for Telugu in their children by sending them to TAM organised classes, actively involving in TAM activities, movies, religious activities and most importantly speaking the language. The only challenge they face is mixed marriages and assimilation with the Tamils as they are the biggest Indian group in Malaysia. Despite Telugus' distinctive cultural practices, they believe that the impact from the dominant Indian community (Tamil) through mixed marriages and assimilation diminishes language use, culture, and heritage due to a smaller cultural distance with Tamils. (Clyne and Kipp, 1991) Besides, all participants unanimously agreed that speaking Telugu gives them the identity and they would want their offspring to learn Telugu for heritage and communication with family members.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, Telugu language has high vitality in Bagan Datoh across all age groups and domains especially home domain. Religious domain shows steady decrease among the oldest to the youngest but based on triangulation of data, there are revitalization and maintenance measures that have been taking place.. The usage of Telugu is the highest among the age group of 56 and above and it decreases slightly among the age groups of 41-55, 26-40 and rises among the age group of 15-25 which is an indication of language revitalisation. Despite the rapid decline in Telugu literacy, it is now being revitalised among the young generation. Spoken Telugu is striving in the community despite the constant exposure of other languages (school, work, social life, entertainment) which contributes to the code switching, code mixing and even lexical borrowings. The data also indicates that the community uses Malay, English, Tamil and 'Other' in a diglossic

relationship and not exclusively which is an indication of mother tongue preservation despite being multilingual. In spite of all these challenges, the Telugu community in Bagan Datoh is striving mainly due to its distinctive cultural and religious practices, close knit community, practice of endogamy, positive attitude towards their mother tongue, revitalisation measures by TAM and current technological advancement (internet and satellite TV) (refer to Extract 10) (Clyne & Kipp; Fasold, 1984). With continuous effort from TAM and support from the community, Telugu language (both spoken and written form) will be revitalized, strive and be preserved in Bagan Datoh.

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