

Language families in India

This is with reference to the article entitled 'Identification of the major language families of India and evaluation of their mutual influence'¹.

Statements regarding the history of Kerala and Tamil Nadu such as the following are erroneous:

(i) 'The results suggest that neighbouring and non-neighbouring classification is not suitable for these languages because there are only four languages and Malayalam, though a non-neighbouring language, is expected to have Indo-European influence as suggested by historical evidence and verified by experimental results. Kerala had been in contact with foreign land since the 15th century, when Vasco da Gama arrived in present-day Kozhikode in 1498 in order to trade spices²⁷⁻²⁹. Gradually, the Portuguese defeated the local rulers and started ruling over Kerala. It is to be noted that similar Portuguese colonization also happened in Goa, which resulted in low Dravidian influence (better identification accuracy of Konkani). After the Portuguese, Kerala came under Dutch rule. Finally by the end of 18th century, the whole of Kerala came under British control.'

(ii) 'Unlike Kerala, Tamil Nadu was ruled mostly by Indian rulers like the Pallavas, the Rashtrakutas, the Cholas and the Pandyas.'

Contrary to the statements reproduced above, historical records show that Kerala was always in contact with foreign lands prior to the 15th century. The Romans, Arabs and Chinese used to trade with Kerala before the Portuguese. It was never ruled by the Portuguese, though they had small forts in coastal areas to

protect their trade. They always traded with the rulers and there were more than 15 kingdoms in Kerala in the 15th century. The Dutch territory was a small fort in Cochin (present day Fort Kochi). Kerala included the Kingdoms of Travancore, Cochin and Malabar. Only Malabar was under British control. Travancore and Cochin were princely states until 1951. Madras Presidency included the whole of Tamil Nadu and beyond. Perhaps the writer should see a map of the Madras Presidency of British India.

1. Sengupta, D. and Saha, G., *Curr. Sci.*, 2016, **110**(4), 667-681.

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Response:

Our reading of historical texts, from ancient to modern, shows that historians have many different versions of a piece of history from researches done at their end and interpretation made thereof. The 280-page text titled *The Dutch in Malabar* published by Usha in 1984 prints 'Selections from the records of the Madras Government, Dutch Records No. 13'. This clearly shows the extent of presence and dominance of Portuguese and Dutch in Kerala. The scanned copy of this book with Kerala University, Trivandrum stamp is available at the webpage: <http://dutchinkerala.com/english/article19.php#.VtKsSube8m9>. The specific website with this and many other references mention that 'From 1498 to

1663, the Portuguese remained the greatest colonial and imperial power in Kerala in the midst of serious threats from the local powers. Finally, by 1663 the Dutch succeeded to expel the Portuguese with their bags and baggage from the Kerala and the Dutch emerged themselves as the greatest colonial and imperial power in Kerala. One hundred and sixty five years of Portuguese rule had left its mark on various aspects of history and on the land and its people.'

Our article presents a study where speech parameters from spoken languages are extracted and used in a pattern recognition framework to identify language families and also assess the influence of a neighbouring language. The scientific body of our work presents in detail the methodology adopted, database used, results for different feature-model combinations and conclusions those results point to. The results have been discussed with reference to existing reports from history that are cited in the reference section. If there is a different opinion regarding parts of those reports written by authors presented in the references, it would be interesting to explore how it connects to the results of our data-driven, machine learning-based study. Since our study is based on the differential representation of parameters and given the spread British colonization had over geographic regions, it is unlikely to have any significant effect on our study.

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