

# A Descriptive Study of Tamil Language and Social Identity Among English-Tamils in Malaysia

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## Abstract

This research describes the status of the Tamil language in Malaysia. More specifically, it describes the reasons of Tamil Language decline in the Malaysian context. It is noted that the Tamil language is considered as an authorized language in the country, nonetheless it has shown indications of failure in latest years compared to three other widely spoken languages. The most important reason for the decline is its squat socio-economic rank in comparison with other three languages since the Tamil language is tranquil connected by scarcity and shortage of societal and dogmatic impacts. Additional reasons include language faithfulness and language approach, language and identity, ethnicity and diglossia. A prescriptive, language-based approach rules in the schools also causing the Tamil language progressively a 'classroom language' that has slight possibility of being used for daily interactions. The research maintains that it is needed to augment the utilization of the language amongst Tamil folk who are also Malaysian. In order to attain the end, it is vital to force people to utilize the language in the house, therefore filling the break amid the official and informal diversities of the language.

**Keywords:** English-Tamils, Malaysia, Social identity, Tamil language

## 1. Introduction

The survey of alterations in customary language usage has become a domain of sociolinguistics research beneath the wider title of language conservation and language alteration. Fishman's (2004) original study on the language maintenance and language alteration assists to present a theoretical framework. This work is now a recognized domain of sociolinguistic study. It looks for to clarify the connection between alterations in characteristic language practice and the monetary, societal, ethnic and emotional procedures engaged while linguistics issues are in tangency in an active societal setting. Several practices involved in declining the language can lead to language damage and demise among which are, for instance, West Gutherland Egalic (WGE), Bihuirh BhLojpuri (BLU) (Mohan & Zador, 2010). In addition, an organized approach for the observation of this trend is presented by Sekani (2008) in discourse societies which undertake linguistic privation. The researches cater for a preliminary idea in order to chart the association amid linguistic usage and socio-linguistic agents.

Surveys about retention and change of language amid societies who speak different languages demonstrate a number of these features. A status of the English language is developed when it becomes widespread across speech communities. It is worth to mention that the wide recognition of the English by diverse speech communities assists to advance its standing as language of interaction both inter-ethnically and intra-ethnically (Kuo, 2017).

To contrast language in failure such as WGE and BLU, it is noted that different from these two languages, the Tamil is ceremoniously recognized. This language is a solemn language in Malaysia which is conversed by a small number of Indian folk. For all Indian people, Tamil is their mother tongue irrespective of their dialect. Excluding Indian people who adopt Tamil as their first language (TL1), others accept other languages as their second language. However, in spite of the official credit specified to the Tamil, studies about language usage midst Indians demonstrate that this language is failing to be used in comparison with additional authorized languages. In this regard, the English is believed to have the most significant part as a means of international interaction and as the means of bond and home-based areas (Kuo, 2017; Dorian, 2015). As such, this study tries to explore the reasons for the decline of the Tamil language use in the Malaysian context.

### *1.1 Research Question*

This study tries to answer the following question:

What are the factors for the decline of the Tamil Language use in the Malaysian context?

## 2. Factors of Tamil Language Decline

### *2.1 Language Faithfulness and Language Approach*

Language faithfulness is about variable affecting failure of the Tamil language. For the justification of its collapse, the definition of bilingualism with regard to speaker's outlook about specific linguistic plans is needed. For example, the attitudinal-affective behavior of the community should be considered in such a way that if faithfulness is declared about linguistic

plans and presenters make use of the specific language programs. In addition, these social and psychological characteristics of linguistic behavior and language approaches will aid to justify the retention or change of language faithfulness of specific groups.

For example, considering a number of the current trends about speech societies who converse in the Tamil is vital. In addition, it is important to recognize the effects of such trends on other high-educated or greater-prestigious language-speaking group. Therefore, it will clarify the trend of language retention and language change among these societies (Lanoue, 2015).

## *2.2 Social and Economic Status of the Tamil Language*

In addition to the language loyalty and language attitude, another factor that will influence the decline of the Tamil language is its social and economic status among other languages. It can be stated that the societal and financial standing of Tamil societies of speech tangled in squat wage jobs have led them to be socially ignored and their contributions to be marginalized. For instance, they worked in the farms of Malaysia and currently in factories. This approach also has resulted their language to be marginalized. (Tajfel, 2013)

To justify the above-mentioned issues, Tamil workers are maybe the main people in the district who only speak one language. Sarcastically, the toughest prototypes of language preservation are shown by these societies who speak the Tamil. The people who worked in the oil industry were stigmatized and remained as indigenous'. The Tamil plantation workers partake small portion of the monetary assets amassed in the farmstead manufacturing. These people were outdistanced via the monetary and technological growth in another segments of the government's budget.

One of the root causes of their inferior social and economic position can be considered to be the lack of proper education particularly in English or professional training. The Tamil language is more commonly spoken among them especially amongst friends and family members. They receive their education mainly in Tamil since they attend Tamil schools which are governed by estate. These schools together with media such as newspapers and TV channels contributed to maintain Tamil language as the widely spoken language among them (Dorian, 2015).

The fact is that the Malaysian Tamils like to apprehend the pecuniary usage of the Tamil. As the Malay language is domestic and it is considered as the means of teaching, therefore it makes economic sense to learn it (Muthusamy & Farashaiyan, 2016). After Malay is the English language which is the next language. Tendency in choosing a language in schools show that less pupils choose Tamil as their additional language in schools. Therefore, this has resulted in lower standards and attainment levels in Tamil among Tamil pupils. Interactions among different ethnics are largely by means of two languages, Malay and English (Sobrielo, 2013).

Due to the globalization, internationalism and English education associated with learning applied sciences for international career viewpoints, the specific prestige is allocated to the English through numerous language societies. Alternatively, Tamil monolingualism is connected to a low job-related position. A Tamil monolingual speaker is inclined to be

appointed in some occupations which have low positions. Therefore, a recognizable outline is formed. It can be said that the middle-level class, social motion and the pecuniary position of the government determine the social identity of the person who has education in the English. On the other hand, squat reputation, small pecuniary capital and small societal motion all influence the societal identity of a person who has educated in the Tamil with squat salary occupation (Williamson, 2012).

### *2.3 Language and Identity*

The choice of language code to be used may be an indication of a community's solidarity. The speech can be described by way of a societal facet of person's self through the collected works about approach and societal self. Its social and psychological trait is expressed by the requirement to belong to or to be identified with diverse groups. It could be argued that Indian society is separated into two clusters: Indians who educated in Tamil and Indians who educated in English (Muthusamy & Farashaiyan, 2016). Those who have educated in the English identify that the English language has higher position and consequently the choice of this language programme is expressed as distinctiveness of something pertaining to the Malaysians who have educated in the English, it is also specified to other universe which speak the English connected by instruction, poetry, and the media such as television, radio, newspapers, and the Internet (Tajfel, 2013).

### *2.4 Ethnicity*

Nevertheless, the Indians who have received English education derive their sense of identity mostly from their social and economic position in the society rather than religion and sex. This results in formation of groups of like-minded people who strive for cultural development and transformations to the betterment of society. Hence the language plays a significant role in people's state of being and is highly dependent in the above mentioned factors (Weinreich, 2008).

The results of the survey indicate that income is negatively related to Tamil language usage, as the people speaking this language earn lower wages compared to English and Malay speaking individuals. However, the Indians with English education associate themselves mostly with their nationality as Malaysians since it provides them with a sense of belonging to a bigger and richer society (Sobrielo, 2013).

As compared to three other widely spoken languages in Malaysia, Tamil is in the lowest position since English is the international language, Chinese is spoken by the majority of the society members and business communities and Malay is the national language and has regional and political significance. This issue is demonstrated in various ways. The sense of confusion in terms of identity is particularly reinforced by English-educated Tamils. This crisis projects itself in the society in form of tendency to demonstrate more usage of Tamil in public and even in official circumstances such as parliament and even in their celebrations. But as it is not the case with all of Tamils, this sense of identity crisis can lead to solidarity although it cannot be denied that there is still support for Tamil language education in the community (Mani & Gopinathan, 2013).

The tendency to maintain Tamil as the main language is mainly derived from the sense of belonging to ethnic groups and cultural structures which prevent individuals to act against the norms. It is still thought by many people that losing their mother tongue deteriorates their culture. The proof is the considerable number of English educated Tamils who cling to their culture and still identify with their Tamil background. Also there are numerous cases who try to keep their mother tongue alive by, for instance, sending their children to Tamil speaking schools and vigorously attempting to speak Tamil at home (Blom & Gumperz, 2005).

### *2.5 Tamil Diglossia*

Diglossia is another term for the Tamil which is developed into two forms: literacy and prestigious forms which can be found in Tamil Nadu. In addition, it is concerned as the form of the Tamil which is spoken by farmer workers. This form later developed into rural dialects (Ferguson, 2012).

The educational backgrounds of Tamil speakers determine the range of its varieties. Therefore, the advent of different varieties in Tamil and the endorsement or renunciation of them may assist to clarify the language alteration among school aging children. Meanwhile it has been argued to support the utilization of the Tamil language in official documents, it is not enough for its functional use of it. Therefore, the literary or formal variety of it is just limited to a trivial number of people who are literate in the language such as tutors, authors and persons involved in the television, radio and broadcasting. In addition, the literature younger individuals also speak in this type of variety.

On the other hand, another variety is utilized broadly via individuals who have slight or they have not educated in Tamil. They make use of Tamil to communicate with their family and friends (Ramiah, 2011). There are certain disputes among Tamil educationalists pertaining to the variability of Tamil be proposed to pupils.

The educationalists have same arguments with regard to the scenery of customaries and standards. Some tutors and authors contend that the mere appropriate variety for whole language learners is the literary one. Therefore, a spoken Tamil variety is not acknowledged by this group and they stress literary Tamil registers for each context.

In this regard, Tamil textbooks put more weight on learning the didactic methods in the Tamil language programme. For reading comprehension texts, there is great reliance on translation. Breakdown may happen and this is considered a normal occurrence while two languages have interactions with each other. At last, this interlanguage stage can lead to more command at more cutting-edge levels of learning the language (Williamson, 2012; Farashaiyan & Muthusamy, 2016).

### **3. Pedagogical Implications**

From the pedagogical aspects of these approaches, one can deduce that unfortunately the majority of teachers tend to hold on to formal techniques when it comes to speaking activities in their classes. This approach can lead to excessive emphasis on written activities including grammar, and on the other hand overlooking the dynamic verbal communication with students.

The traditional speaking activities and formal techniques are still more common in language classes. The speaking activities that include contextual and case-based exercises are still very rare. Therefore, it is of significant importance to establish new learning techniques that provide more dynamic and practical speaking activities. For example, a learner who is in primary school does not have similar access to the English words and the lexical words compared to the word that young students who were used for the research had and code-mixed them to use it in conversations presented by Tamil and his co-worker (Saravanan,2009).

The trends about learning the language and language usage may be affected by teachers' attitudes with regard to other factors. In this regard, young learners are often banned to make use the language by prescriptive teachers. Their errors become blemished. Therefore, children elude to make use the language both in the class and house. It may quicken more usage of the English language. It can be declared that the language of home and playground is not regarded as formal languages. In addition, "classroom language" is a language which is learnt in schools.

It seems that instructors may not aware of instructional functions of playground language. In this regard, no comprehensive probe has been reported regarding child language use or development among Tamil learners. Therefore, it cannot increase teachers' consciousness about patterns of child language acquisition among Tamil children who learn English (Saravanan,2009).

In the field of media, it could be added that using formal registers is a positive point. For example, the formal registers which usually are utilized via the spokesman of the radio in programs in which kids who are invited to TV shows and documents and at the end, make the interviewees feel ashamed or speechless. Even lots of grown up interviews are sorry that they aren't able to speak Tamil fluently. They think that they don't have enough language knowledge and they try not using it. It has also been witnessed that some participants don't like to speak Tamil languages or be active in its related social and cultural activities. The huge differences between verbal Tamil and a less official registrar in certain context is that the Spoken Tamil does not interest people to obtain further auditors and inspire the lecturers to communicate in a language but that other Indian speakers are more involved in such situation. There is a sudden improvement in understanding the normal occurrence of changing of languages (code-switching) and mixing of languages (code-mixing) the interlanguage occurrence that accure while the languages are used almost simultaneously (Williamson, 2012).

#### **4. Conclusion**

It can be disputed that the Tamil is spoken as a classroom language among the younger people of Tamils. The imperative view to teaching and learning is its first reason. The second reason is communications inter-ethnically and intra-ethnically among Indian people in the English. On the other hand, the use of the Tamil for the daily life is decreased. Irrespective of the care for the Tamil language, Indian people who are from the middle class should be heedful that since the Malaysian educational system is based on both language and academic achievement systems, Indian youngsters should center on maintaining some places for themselves in future in universities.



The problem is the achievement stages in Indians has decrease among all educational levels. So parents who are grouped as middle class prefer that their son or daughter focusses more on academic achievements, or science or subjects such as physics and English literature. It has been argued that the Indian's social exclusion is somehow because they accidentally made the students to use and learn their mother tongue. As the Chinese population grows higher, more resources such as good schools, teachers and facilities are given to special schools that teach Chinese alongside with English at the first language level. Since the Tamil language is in decline, therefore, it is essential to provide Tamil language classes for both pre-school children and students in order to cater for early care for the acquisition and usage of the Tamil language. At the present time, there are some language centers managed by government and private institutions that teach the Tamil language.

This study described the factors of the Tamil Language shift in the Malaysian context. Other studies can be conducted to explore the factors of the Tamil Language shift in other contexts such as Singapore or other contexts. In addition, more research can be done to examine other languages in decline.

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