The Impact of Standard Spoken Tamil in Singapore Tamil Classrooms

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Abstract
This paper examines recent changes in the teaching of Tamil in Singapore to students from Tamil language homes. Tamil is a diglossic language, with a formal or H variety that is used mainly in writing and is learned in schools and a spoken or L variety that is used in informal conversations and is learned naturally through exposure. Standard Spoken Tamil (SST) is the variety used by educated Tamils regardless of their caste or region in Tamil Nadu. Following the review of the Tamil language curriculum and pedagogy in 2006 by the Ministry of Education, Singapore (MOE), a Standardised variety of Spoken Tamil (SST) has become a key feature of Tamil language syllabus since 2008. This paper is based on a qualitative analysis of 18 primary school Tamil lessons and interviews with the participating teachers to understand: (a) the impact of introducing SST in Tamil classrooms; (b) the reactions of the teachers; and (c) those of the students to the lessons and techniques.

Keywords: Tamil language, Standard Spoken Tamil, Literary Tamil (LT), Written Tamil (WT), Tamil language classrooms, Singapore

Introduction
Language maintenance presents several long-term problems for minority communities, one of which is language shift. The shift to the host country’s educational language can be as rapid as within two to three years. But community leaders encourage the new migrants to maintain their home languages as their heritage languages and for their ethnolinguistic identities (Mihyon, 2008; Wiley, 2001). In Singapore, with a population comprising Chinese, Malays, Indians and
Eurasians, the language of instruction in schools and universities is English. At the same time, students have to study their mother tongue language (Mandarin, Malay or Tamil) through the formal educational system from the primary grades to Junior College. Children are expected to begin their formal schooling with a base in their home language.

However, the situation is complicated by the fact that some degree of language shift has already taken place in the communities in Singapore. Saravanan (2001) studied the network patterns of bilingual Chinese, Malay and Tamil children and found a shift in language use patterns from the community language to English. In general, the community language is preferred when interacting with the grandparent’s generation, whereas English is used to speak with other children of the same age group. Mohamed Aidil Subhan (2007) reports on the declining linguistic proficiency of Malays as English is taking on the role of a *lingua franca* within the Malay community; he found that younger Malays were unable to use the standard variety of language.

As earlier mentioned, students in Singapore study two languages, English and one of these languages - Mandarin, Malay or Tamil. Bilingualism has been a feature of the Singapore school system since the 1960s (Tan Jason, 2002). “English has been touted as the language that will best provide access to science and technology. At the same time, the study of one of the three other languages -- Mandarin, Malay or Tamil -- was promoted as a means of preserving what were termed “traditional values” and of preventing deculturalization amid rapid societal modernization” (Tan Jason, 2002).

In Singapore, the three mother tongue languages (MTLs) are offered in schools as second languages. The Minister for Information and the Arts and Second Minister for trade and Industry stated that “[t]o transmit Chinese culture and the Chinese language effectively to successive generations of Chinese Singaporeans, we need a Chinese intellectual and cultural elite” (Yeo, 1998). On Malay, Masagos Zulkifli (2009) said that it is not the teachers’ responsibility alone but “a collective responsibility – involving parents, schools, Institutes of Higher learning, community organisations and the media”. In the Tamil
community, the Ministers and social leaders wish to produce more cultural elites to make the language a living language in Singapore. The Tamil Language Curriculum and Pedagogical Review Committee (MOE, 2005) portrays its ideal future Tamil Singaporean with bilingual and bicultural abilities to have Tamil as the heartbeat of the community.

Teaching the MTLs in Singapore is a challenging task as more and more students come from English-speaking homes. The Educational Minister Dr Ng Eng Hen (2009) said that,

“Since the 1980s, more of our Primary 1 students are coming from households where English is the dominant home language... Only 1 in 10 of Primary 1 Chinese students in 1982 (quarter century, age 33 today) came from homes that used English — the figure today is nearly 6 in 10. For Indians it has moved from 3 in 10 to 6 in 10; Malays — 0.5 in 10 to 3.5 in 10. A seismic shift in language environment has occurred within one generation. Those above 40 years of age today would have grown up in homes that spoke their MTL, either predominantly or partly, either with parents, grandparents or siblings”.

In this multicultural and multilingual situation, teaching has to address the different needs of the different communities. Each community is unique as it forms a different proportion of the population. The same techniques and strategies cannot be used to teach Mandarin, Malay, and Tamil because of the differences in the communities’ language attitudes, language use in their personal and professional domains, opportunities for the use of the language within and outside homes, economic and cultural values of the language: and the community’s economic development and confidence.
As a minority community in Singapore, the Tamils and Tamil language use have their own issues. This paper first describes some of these issues. It then examines the use of spoken Tamil in Singapore, its impact on the Tamil language syllabus and the responses of students and teachers to Standard Spoken Tamil (SST).

**Varieties of Tamil**

Tamil is characterized by diglossia (Britto, 1986; Ferguson, 1972). According to Ferguson (1972), there are two main varieties of Tamil - the formal or H variety is used mainly in writing, and the second is the spoken or L variety that is used in ordinary everyday conversations.

Within spoken Tamil, Schiffman (1998) has identified a variety termed Standard Spoken Tamil (SST) that is used by educated Tamil speakers to communicate in formal and informal situations. When a group of Tamil people from different dialect backgrounds meet, they use SST. It is a non-Brahmin variety that is not particular to a region and is understood by Tamils from all dialects. Schiffman (1998) described it as a spoken koine with a standardised grammar, syntax, and pronunciation. Annamalai (in Seetha, et al (2006) and Agasthialingom (2008)) adds that this is the variety that symbolises the community’s upward movement and developmental mobility of socio-economic status. SST is used between individuals in work settings as well as Tamil movies and dramas and is now being used in Singapore television dramas.

In contrast, Written Tamil (WT) is used in formal situations and in writing. It requires formal training as it involves a more complex method of expression. Needless to say, the Tamil variety used in writing and for school examinations is not necessarily most suitable for use in daily interaction as it is more akin to a second language than a mother tongue. Annamalai (2011) says that there is a distinction between the written language and writing the spoken language.

In Tamil Nadu, a few major varieties of Tamil language are used. WT is the variety generally used in Tamil newspapers, which can be un-
derstood by a person who is able to read Tamil. The Literary level
Written Tamil (LT) is the Tamil used in ancient poems. It is a variety
easily understood by educated Tamil. Spoken Tamil is the variety
used by people to interact in informal situations in the home, school
and religious domains. Within Spoken Tamil, there are many dialectal
varieties based on community sub-groups (e.g. Chettiar, Nadar,
Brahmin, Mudaliar, etc.) and geographical districts (e.g. Tanjore,
Trinelveli, Madurai, Arcot, and Chennai). Although these dialectical
varieties of Spoken Tamil are considered a low variety much like the
colloquial variety, a high variety of Spoken Tamil, the standardised
Spoken Tamil has emerged in recent centuries.

In Singapore, SST has long been in use, and it has gained such wide-
spread acceptance that it is assumed to be the native speaker's spoken
language. Unfortunately, this is not the form adopted in the class-
room where emphasis is on the more literary form. Hence, students
from English-speaking homes are unable to use the spoken form in
their own community as the only variety they know is the WT variety.
If Tamil were to be a living language in Singapore, it has to be used
actively and spontaneously by young Tamil students. To bridge the
divide between the community and the classroom, teachers need to
be willing to bring samples of SST into the classroom by identifying
suitable recordings and encouraging their students to listen to and
discuss such material.

**Standard Spoken Tamil as a Model for Language Usage**
SST is the variety used at homes and in informal interactions. No
formal or special training is needed to learn the SST. Speaking in SST
is easier than speaking in WT. SST connects the family, home,
school, and community. At the same time, to acquire WT, a person
has to go through formal training as it is used in formal situations and
formal writing. In Singapore schools, written examinations in Tamil
require the formal WT.

A very small percentage of Tamils in Singapore use colloquial Tamil
(CT) terms in the midst of their SST; for example they say *cootta nalla
kottikko*, which-literally means to throw the rice well, whereas the SST
term for kottikkoo is caappiTu which means eat. In classrooms too, certain students mix the colloquial terms with their SST.

In Singapore, the SST variety is used at home, in the community, media and business domains. In 1995, Tamil radio and television stations switched from WT to SST in their informal programmes. Perhaps the most pressing reason to promote a switch to SST is that many students of the language complain that it is difficult for them to speak in Tamil. This, in turn, is because they were not exposed to the variety used in the classroom from their childhood (Saravanan, 1993). The first exposure of a Tamil child to WT is in the classroom. It is undoubtedly important that children be encouraged and supported to use their mother tongue language. If a Tamil family lives in a non-Tamil community, it becomes even more important to expose the child to the mother tongue language so that s/he can build a strong foundation in that language and be able to use it with confidence in his/her later life.

A child’s early exposure to Tamil would result in early acquisition of his/her mother tongue language. A child who is exposed to his/her mother tongue language will be able to enjoy his/her mother tongue language lessons. For Indian Singaporean children, late acquisition of Tamil in the school will make it difficult for them to learn the language with ease and to move to WT later. Before 2005, students were exposed to WT in their Tamil language classes and there were no opportunities to use SST. This created an awkward situation wherein students speak in formal WT in informal settings.

The MOE Singapore (2005:14) which strongly encourages the use of SST gives the following examples to differentiate between SST and WT, a formal variety used in Spoken form:

a. I want money

   enakku paNam veeNTum (WT)
   enakku paNam veeNum (SST)
b. He is very good

avar mikavum nallavar \( (WT) \)
avaru romba nallavaru \( (SST) \)

c. Did you sell your house?

niinkal unkal viittai viRRuittiirkalaa \( (WT) \)
niinkal unkal viittai vittuttingalaa? \( (SST) \)

In the above examples, there is no structural difference between the two varieties. But in b., the adjective mikavum in WT is romba in SST. It is also possible that more than one SST term exists for the same WT term. In c., the verb ‘sell’ in WT (unkaL) and in SST (unka) have different spellings.

Example 1: Mother is going to the shop

In Singapore, there are a number of Tamil varieties used by the community. The Literary level of Written Tamil variety (LT) is archaic Tamil used in formal situations. Some Tamil educators use this variety because they believe in using a pure and high variety of Tamil. Written Tamil (WT) is also a formal Tamil variety which is used in newspapers (Saravanan, 1993). This is not a difficult variety and can be understood without consulting a dictionary. The Standard Spoken Tamil variety (SST) is used by educated Tamils and it gives respect to the speakers in informal situations (Schiffman, 1998; Saravanan, 1993). The other varieties are used by certain community or age groups in the Singapore community. However, we see a high use of the SST variety starting in the late 1990s. In the simple example below, ‘Mother is going to the shop’, these varieties of Tamil are illustrated. In all varieties (nos. 1 to 7), the Tamil word for mother and shop are the same. However, the phrase ‘is going to’ is celkiraar in LT (no. 1), pookiRaar in WT (no. 2) and poorRaanka in SST (no. 3). In colloquial Tamil variety (CT), a non-standard spoken Tamil, the phrase ‘to the shop’ is shortened to kaTikki (no. 4). In no. 5, pooRaa is used instead. The word comes from a non-standard spoken Tamil used by a certain group of newly immigrated Tamil expatriates. In no. 6, pooRaani is another non-standard spoken Tamil that is used
by students in their teens. Lastly, a non-standard spoken Tamil variety used by primary school pupils in their informal speech is presented in no. 7. The phrase going Raani shows the influence of English (going) in their speech.

Mother is going to the shop

1. அம்மா கைடக்குச் செல்கிறார் (LT)
   amma kaTaikkuc celkiRaar (LT)

2. அம்மா கைடக்குப் பொட்டிகிறார் (WT)
   amma kaTaikkappookiRaar (WT)

3. அம்மா கைடக்குப் பொருந்திகிறார் (SST)
   amma kaTaikkupooRaa (SST)

4. அம்மா காதிக்குப் பொவுது (CT)
   amma kaTikki poovutu (CT)

5. அம்மா கைடக்குப் பொருந்து (a dialect used by newly immigrated Tamil expatriates)
   amma kaTaikkappooRaa

6. அம்மா கைடக்குப் பொருந்து (a non-standard spoken Tamil used by teenage students)
   amma kaTaikku pooRaani

7. அம்மா கைடக்கு பொருந்து (a Taminglish variety used by primary school pupils)
   amma kaTaiikpooRaani

Mazhinan (1996:31), chairman of Tamil Education Review Committee, SINDA, defined SST and the need for a critical awareness of it in Tamil Education in Singapore:

“From scholars to the man in the street, Tamils speak to each other in what is known as spoken Tamil. This is the natural or face-to-face communication. Written Tamil or literary Tamil is used mostly in writings but also in formal communication such as
public speaking and broadcasting. The difference between spoken Tamil and written Tamil is so much greater than the difference, for example, between colloquial English and formal English, that comparisons between the two languages become meaningless. This extreme diglossia is unique to Tamil among the four official languages in Singapore and therefore creates a unique problem for the Tamil education system”.

Nadaraja (in Seetha et al., 2006), a linguistic consultant for the Tamil syllabus at MOE, enumerated some observations and recommendations on the use of SST/Street Tamil/Youth Tamil/Movie Tamil. First, he noted that WT was used as the language for textbooks after Primary one. So, he recommended the use of SST in textbooks as well as in classroom presentations. Second, he observed that Tamil teachers were using the regional dialect. He instead advised them to use the non-caste related dialect that is used by mass media (radio, movies, etc.) as it is considered SST and thus, it does not contradict his first recommendation. Third, he stressed that there is no such thing as street language and youth language; they are considered as home and regional dialects. Further, for comparison, he cited the problem on regional and social dialects in Tamil Nadu and stated that, “That is the reason why we always say that let us use only written Tamil for reading and writing and spoken Tamil only for listening in the classroom” (Nadaraja in Seetha et al., 2006).

In Singapore, the Spoken Tamil has been standardised by the community and now among Singapore Tamils this variety is an accepted norm in informal situations. This SST is a symbol of a developed linguistic variety and a social marker of the community’s language ecology. As Schiffman (2010) stated, this variety is an emergent variety which is used in the mass media and spoken by educated speakers in the Tamil community in Tamil Nadu and Singapore.
Spoken Tamil includes all spoken varieties of Tamil language including the varieties based on geographical districts, social groups (castes) and age groups of students. For standard spoken Tamil, there is a standardised variety. This standardised variety could be a dialectal variety but standardised by the educators’ community. In Singapore, it is the Tanjore variety as in earlier times, a significant number of Tanjore people came to live in Singapore. If there is no SST, within Spoken Tamil there is no high and low level difference. If a person speaks colloquial Tamil (CT) or a standard variety, both are considered as spoken Tamil. But in reality, CT is not accepted. SST gives respect to the listener and speaker. As Annamalai stated (in Seetha et al., 2006), this variety shows the upward movement of the community and one’s status. Hence, a person who generally uses CT, must also try to use SST as it gives prestige and shows solidarity with the community.

As an insider in Singapore Tamil classrooms, I overheard the following in trainee teachers’ talk in their teaching practicum. In Example 2, the teacher trainees used CT because they did not know the difference between the low (stigmatised) and high varieties. SST is a non-stigmatised variety. Hence, teachers’ understanding of Spoken Tamil and SST are important to develop students as confident speakers of Tamil.

**Example 2: Colloquial Tamil**

1. Go to McDonald’s and pour well

   மீக்குத்துள்ளதுல்ல பெப்பரு சுழந்து

   கோத்திக்கோன்கா (CT)

   McDonald’s la pooi nalla kottikoonka (CT)

2. We won’t eat anything in the night

   ஒன்றும் தின்னமெடாம்

   ராவைக்கி நாமா சித்தாண்டோம் (CT)

   rattirikku naanka onnum caapiTamaattoom (SST)

In no. 1, Example 2, *kottikoonka* is the colloquial term for the phrase ‘eat well’. In SST, it is *caapiTunka*. For no. 2, the SST for the collo-
quial words *raavaikkii* and *tinnamaattoom* are *raatthirikku* (in the night) and *caapiTamaattoom* (we won’t eat), respectively.

The Tamil Community in Singapore

Even though Tamil is considered a MTL in schools, majority of Tamil children aged five years and above do not communicate in this language. Statistics show a decreasing trend in homes speaking Tamil: 52.2% in the 1980s, 43.7%, in the 1990s and 42.9% in 2000. This is partly due to the influence of English, which is being used widely, but also because with both parents working, the use of Tamil at home decreases and Tamil is only used in the classroom. According to the latest survey, 38% of Tamil students speak English in their homes and 26% speak Tamil occasionally. Nearly 33% of Tamil students speak English and Tamil frequently while 30% of students speak Tamil at home and 23% of them said that they speak Tamil mostly with occasional English at home. Here, 82% of Tamil students use both languages in different proportions. Only 7% use Tamil at home and 12% use English as their main conversational language. We could say that only 38% of Tamil language students speak English at home and nearly 62% use Tamil at home. This may be seen as a positive signal but this is a small increase when compared to previous surveys on young students.¹

Among parents, there is growing concern that children spend more time on mother tongue language work (20%) and reading books (33%). They would prefer their children to spend more time on other subjects. In certain schools, for the primary classes to be selected as a good class, MTL is not counted in the selection and ranking criteria. Students who are in primary 6 and secondary 4 classes have a strong perception that learning the MTL subject is important (95% and 87%), enjoy Tamil lessons (94% and 87%) and like to learn the subject (95% and 87%), respectively.

Tamil students have few opportunities to use the language outside home and school. They have to buy special software for Tamil if they want to use the language in computers and mobile phones.

Without ready and free access to Tamil language in computing and mobile technology, they have no choice but use English. In addition, there are fewer chances for Tamil students to see advertisements or other printed materials in Tamil. This is reflected in a report published by MOE in 2010 that states that the percentage of Indian students whose first home language is English has increased from 49% in 1991 to 59% in 2010 (MOE, 2010). In another survey involving 1,600 Indian primary and secondary school students, K Ramiah found that six out of ten students prefer speaking in English and more than 40% admitted that they would not study Tamil if it were not compulsory. One student was quoted as saying, “it drives me crazy just to look at a comprehension passage” and another said, “my parents tell me that if I learn Tamil, I will only get a job as a coolie” (The Straits Times, 2000).

Despite the full support from the government to promote the use of the Tamil language, the community continuously raises questions such as Tamil cooru pooTuma? (Will Tamil provide food to you?) and Tamil paTittaal veLinaaTu pookamuTiyumaa? (Will you go overseas with Tamil education alone?). A significant number of Tamil community members are doubtful about reaping any benefits from using the Tamil language at homes. This is further compounded by the fact that Tamil is not taught in an interesting way in schools (Shegar and Ridzuan, 2005; MOE, 2005).

Reviews of the Mother Tongue Language (MTL) Curriculum
Despite Tamil teachers’ strong beliefs in espousing literary level Written Tamil rather than using the informal variety in school settings, there have been complaints that the Tamil taught in school is archaic and not graded by difficulty level. In his study of primary school textbooks and syllabus, Schiffman (1998) found the vocabulary difficult and stressed that SST has to be the foundation of textbooks in Singapore. He portrayed this state as being “tongue-tied” and raised questions about a language policy for Tamil as there was no spoken Tamil in the Tamil classrooms before 2005 (Schiffman, 1998). He suggested that corpus planning of Tamil is necessary to develop functional use of the language. Spoken Tamil should be standardized be-
cause as Nadaraja says, “Singapore has its own dialect and it is more appropriate to use that in the teaching materials” (Seetha et al., 2006).

In 1996, the Singapore Indian Development Association (SINDA) conducted a review and called for an understanding and adoption of Standard Spoken variety in Tamil classrooms (Mahizhnan, 1996). SINDA also recommended addressing the clear differences and distinctions between the Tamil education syllabuses for the Secondary school streams, namely, Express, Normal and Normal Technical streams, and stressed the need for a word list in textbooks. The MOE-engaged Forbes Research (1999) mother tongue language review committee found that students had difficulties in comprehension and composition and did not have much fun or interest in learning Tamil. The committee recommended suitable standards with the shift in the students’ home background (MOE, 2002). Certain features of the Tamil language syllabus, such as proverbs unsuitable for the local context, were removed. In 2004-2005, the Centre for Research in Pedagogy and Practice, National Institute of Education (NIE) conducted a curriculum review and recommended, among other things, using an accessible language i.e., SST, linking the textbook content with assessment, undertaking textbook reform, and using multimedia and IT.

In 2005, another review was carried out and a Forbes survey was conducted with its stakeholders (MOE, 2005). The findings remained the same. Students found open-ended comprehension very difficult and learning Tamil was not fun or ‘cool’. Here, the objective was to nurture and sustain in all children an interest in learning the mother tongue languages to their highest level, and in using the language well after they leave school. One of the review’s key recommendations was the use of Spoken Tamil in the Tamil classes to have confident and effective bilingual Indian Singaporeans. The committee strongly felt that use of SST in day-to-day life and outside classroom was the key to make Tamil a living language in Singapore. The new syllabus was implemented in 2008 for primary schools and in 2010 for secondary schools; the textbook materials were produced in phases. In 2010, an MTL review was carried out again. A key finding was that the measures implemented in 2008 were effective and efforts would
be made to build on the strengths of the measures already in place. Information and communication technology (ICT) would be used more as young students are already ‘digital natives’. Further, the MTL curriculum needs to be tailored to the students’ home background to develop students “as proficient users who can communicate effectively using the language in real-life contexts and apply it in interpersonal communication, listening and reading for comprehension, and presenting in spoken and written forms” (MOE, 2011). The revised curriculum was implemented at the end of 2010. Table 1 presents an overview of all the above-mentioned reviews, recommendations and results. Since the recommendations from the reviews conducted by NIE and MOE (MOE, 2005; 2010), SST has become an important aspect of Tamil teaching in Singapore.

Table 1
The key issues and recommendations of the reviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Issues and recommendations</th>
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<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>Need awareness on SST and second language pedagogy</td>
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<td>1999</td>
<td>Tamil lessons are difficult for students and the change of home language background</td>
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<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Textbook reform, use of accessible language and link texts with assessment and use of IT</td>
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<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Shift in home language background and difficulty for students to learn and write exams</td>
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<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Use of IT and strengthening of the implementation of SST</td>
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Researchers have provided feedback that spoken language should be emphasized in classrooms. A number of research studies (Annalalai, 2011; Asher, 1982; Ferguson, 1972; Mahizhnan, 1996; Mani & Gopinathan, 1983; Ministry of Education, 2005; Ramiah, 1991, 2002; Saravanan, 1989, 1998; Saravanan, Lakshmi, & Caleon, 2007; Schiffmann, 1995, 1998, 2002, 2008) have been carried out to identify, define and develop spoken Tamil and the SST variety in educational and media domains. Following committee recommendations, the revised curriculum and textbooks for selected primary classes were introduced in 2008 in Singapore. Further, the project reports were presented at the MOE Review committee. The nationwide awareness for Standardised variety of spoken Tamil in education allows the commu-
nity to complement these efforts. Greater emphasis was recommend-
ed to be placed on developing students’ listening and speaking skills especially in the lower primary years. Students need oral skills so that they can use Tamil confidently in daily situations (MOE, 2005: 35). The revised curriculum should ensure a strong grounding in spoken Tamil so that students develop a lifelong facility in the language through being able to comfortably switch between Standard Spoken and formal Tamil in different contexts (MOE, 2005: 36). Although spoken Tamil is currently used in many classrooms”, teachers still encourage their students to speak formal Tamil in a number of class-
rooms. Don Snow (1996:16) argues that learners need to amass suffi-
cient vocabulary in reading text and listening to speech in order to develop a solid foundation in that culture. After the curriculum re-
view report at the NIE (Seetha et al., 2006), SST has an important place in Tamil teacher training.

Teachers’ understanding of spoken and written Tamil is critical, for which training is required. NIE started pre- and in-service courses; the majority of in-service teachers have gone through the new courses and pre-service teachers have studied the importance and use of SST in the classroom. Still, teachers need further guidance on how to assess SST in examinations. For this, they need an understanding of sociolinguistics and bilingualism theories that will help them understand student difficulties in language learning. Teachers in the MOE-sponsored M Ed programme are aware of these theories. A significant number of Tamil teachers have studied in English-medium schools but still use the mother tongue at home. However, with limited input to their language, greater expertise is needed especially since a sizeable proportion of students in the Tamil classes are expa-
triate children.

During formal interviews and informal discussions with the Tamil teachers conducted for this study, some teachers said that although changes have been implemented, the school management expects them to give good academic results. One of the changes that has been implemented is the use of Standard Spoken Tamil (SST) in classrooms. In addition, the students, particularly Primary 6 students, are expected to know Written Tamil (WT) for major government ex-
aminations such as the PSLE (Primary Six Leaving Examination). The implemented changes have positive results as stated elsewhere in the paper but at the same time, teachers are required to teach WT to students for examinations and they are also expected to cover everything in the syllabus. This implies that teachers need to focus on preparing students for examinations and complete the syllabus and textbook lessons. Hence, they need more training on how to utilize the early primary classes to develop listening, speaking and reading and the upper primary classes to teach writing in order to prepare students for national examinations. A similar pattern of skills development and exam preparation can be followed in secondary school.

Compared to previous years, there is now significant progress in the use of Tamil. The Strait Times (February 20, 2000) reported that the Umar Pulavar Tamil centre was to be created as a national resource centre and mount it as a teaching centre to embrace the setting up of Tamil language elites who may become future leaders in Singapore. For the past few years, the Tamil Language Council and Tamil community organizations have celebrated yearly the Tamil Language Festival. Various programmes such as debates for students from primary school through Junior College build a foundation in the language and culture. There is interest in the community to use Tamil in the 24-hour radio programme Oli 96.8 where young *comperes* who are mostly bilingually educated can get a feel for the language. Vasanthan TV has been given extended hours and a separate channel. There is now wide viewership for locally produced Tamil dramas such as *veettai*, *collamalee*, *nijankaL* and *vaijayanti*. The popular programmes which used to be featured in Vasantham TV received recognition for their wide viewership. Recordings of these programmes are available at the xin.msn.com website.

**The Use of SST in Singapore**

Mahizhnan (1996:31) argued that the review committee would like to urge MOE to set up a special committee to study the viability of introducing and using SST widely within the school system. In Singapore, SST has long been in use, and it has gained such widespread acceptance that it is assumed to be the native speaker’s spoken language. Unfortunately, this is not the form adopted in the classroom
where the literary form is emphasized. Hence, students from English-speaking homes were unable to use the spoken form at the community and the only variety they knew is the written form, which is Written Tamil. In Singapore, if Tamil is to be a living language it has to be used actively and spontaneously by young Tamil students (Seetha et al., 2006; Shegar and Ridzuan, 2005). To bridge the divide between the community and the classroom, teachers need to use SST in the classroom by using suitable recordings and encouraging their students to listen to and discuss such material.

In speaking or oratorical competitions organized by various Tamil associations, students are good at speaking fast or using rhyme. However, in a debate, even students in higher classes struggle to speak in the impromptu round where they have to answer questions posed by the judge. Here, we find that native speakers or Singaporean students whose parents are from India are effectively bilingual in both the spoken and written varieties of Tamil, whereas Singaporean students who study Tamil as a second language have difficulty switching between the two varieties (Vaish, 2007; Shegar and Ridzuan, 2005). This year, the government and the Tamil Language Council are organizing a month-long Tamil language festival.

Until 1995, audio media used WT, but now SST is used more widely in the media (Saravanan, 1993). Schiffman (1988) also noted that Tamil movies have adopted SST. As such, Tamil teachers especially those who are teaching early primary school classes, need to expose students to the spoken variety as this is the variety they are likely to encounter outside school. After being exposed to Standard Spoken Tamil, students can then better learn literary Tamil which still holds significance as a more formal variety for use in assessment and evaluation.

It is envisaged that the use of SST in the classroom will have several beneficial outcomes. First, if the language variety used at home is similar to the one used in schools, students are less likely to have difficulty mastering the language. Second, the switch to SST will increase student motivation to communicate in Tamil and reduce the stress associated with learning Tamil. Third, the use of SST in school
will heighten the impact of efforts by the popular media, such as Oli 96.8 FM (Tamil radio) and Vasantha Channel (Tamil Television channel), to reach out to Tamilians of all age groups in their mother tongue, which will in turn increase the salience of Tamil as a living language in Singapore.

SST can work as the link between the home and school language to help students improve their Tamil. Thinnappan (in Seetha, et al. 2006) and Rajendran (in Seetha et al., 2006) stated that SST should be encouraged, but research is needed (Annamalai in Seetha, et al. (2006)). Teaching SST in schools will increase students' awareness of their ethnicity, language, and identity in Singapore. In bridging their experiences at home, in the community, and at school, students will learn to appreciate their culture. This is in fact a key objective of the current Tamil curriculum in Singapore schools. Most importantly, the propagation of the spoken form of the language will slow down the level of language loss that continues to be observed in Singapore, where Tamil is a required second language for students of South Indian backgrounds (Seetha et al., 2006).

The Study
From 2005, both the Tamil education community and the Tamil community became aware of major changes in Tamil education and the use of Standard Spoken Tamil. Hence teachers started using Standard Spoken Tamil from 2006. Their syllabus was re-designed and the textbooks implemented in 2008 (MOE, 2008). The three research questions addressed during the project were:

1. What is the impact of the SST which has been implemented in the school curriculum?
2. What are the responses of the teachers who teach this variety of Tamil?
3. What do the students, who are the future Tamil-speaking Singaporeans, think about the lessons and the techniques that are used by the teachers who teach Standard Spoken Tamil?
Data Collection
The data analysed for the present study come from audio and video recordings of eighteen lessons from Primary one to five Tamil classrooms and interviews with the stakeholders, i.e. teachers and students under two research projects, “An Examination of the use of Standard Spoken Tamil in the school and media domains in Singapore in order to establish SST as an additional resource for the teaching and learning of Tamil” (CRP 10/06 SL) and “Curriculum Implementation in Early Primary Schooling in Singapore (CIEPSS)” (OER47/08MS). Eight lessons from Primary three to Primary five classes from eight schools comprise the data taken from the first project. These lessons which are nearly seven hours in length were recorded from 2008 to 2010. Data from the second project come from another eight schools and consist of five hours of five Primary one Tamil lessons and five Primary two Tamil lessons that are five hours and 10 minutes long. The lessons were recorded between March and November 2009. All 14 excerpts used in this paper were extracted from the aforementioned data sets. The team of research assistants who had transcribed the lessons includes a native speaker. They all have extensive experience in Tamil language research and were trained by the principal investigators of both projects. The transcriptions were coded using a scheme developed by the author based on Spoken Tamil grammar (Schiffman, 1979, 1999). In addition to the video and audio recordings of the lessons, the author interviewed the teachers who conducted the lessons. As part of the first project, she also talked with primary school students on their Tamil language classes through formal and informal interviews during her learning workshops and school visits. She also observed student-to-student interactions before and after their Tamil language classes.

Language Varieties used in Tamil Classrooms
This section examines the language forms used by teachers and students in Tamil classrooms.

Based on the observations of lessons done for the present study, senior Tamil teachers in Singapore tend to use more WT while younger teachers use spoken formal Tamil with code switching. Due to their limited content knowledge and unaware of how to use their passive
cultural knowledge, younger novice teachers tend to follow their lesson scripts strictly and in doing so, they fail to invite their students to be active participants in class. When speaking Tamil, teachers occasionally include words from WT in order to avoid using their English equivalents. When this is not possible, teachers mix English with SST.

During group activities, students tend to speak in English even though some are proficient in SSL when the teacher is not around. In the presence of a teacher though, the students use SST. When writing answers or compositions, students are willing to raise questions and request translations for English terms or request a WT equivalent for the SST terms.

Based on this corpus’s frequency profile, the following five words are most frequently used by students in their classroom conversations with their peers and teachers: வந்து (vantu) (came); இருக்கு (irukku) (have); நான் (naan) (I); அந்த (anta) (that); ஒரு (oru) (one) and ஆசிரியர் (aaciriyar) (teacher). These words are also among the 500,000 SSL words in the corpus data bank transcriptions from the first project (Lakshmi and Saravanan, 2009).

Many students have their first experiences with Tamil in the classroom and they are exposed to WT before any kind of spoken Tamil. This is usually the case for students from English-speaking homes as illustrated in Example 3 below. In Example 3, the students used the verbs, unNaaamal (without eating), alikkaama (without giving), kaanppikkiratu (it shows) and the nouns mannani (the king), and payanum (use) in WT instead of the SST terms caapiTaamal (without eating), kuTukkaama (without giving), kaatturatu (it shows), and the nouns raajaavai (the king), prayojanamum (use), laabamum (profit).
Example 3: WT and SST mix
1. I will give my food

என்ேனாட் உணைவுதருவன்

2. He gave it to him without eating. He will always promote good values, that’s why they give

அவர் உண்ணாமல் அவர்ட்டு கோட்டுட்டு
அவர் பண்பாடும் நல்ல பண்பாடுகள் வளர்ப்பார்னு
அவர்ட்டு கோட்டுக்குறங்கு

3. It did not benefit

பயனும் அளிக்காமப் பொயிட்டு

4. I think it is showing the king. Aang.

மன்னைன் காண்பிக்கிறது என்று

Primary School Lesson Excerpts
In the early primary classes, the students show an interest in speaking. Students from English-speaking homes use English and Written Tamil. The teachers also use English, either when they are unsure about the Tamil translation or to help students understand.
**Excerpt 1**
The language variety used by the teacher (WT or SST) influences which variety students use to continue the turn. This can be seen in the excerpt below. When the teacher uses SST, students tend to respond in SST. But when the teacher uses WT, students feel pressured to respond in WT.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. ஆசிரியர்</th>
<th>Generally the teacher uses WT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ஆசிரியர் வணக்கம் நாம் இப்படுத்து ஒரு முக்கியமான ஒரு சொற்றையைப் பற்றியும் விரும்புகிறோம். நீங்கள் அதைக்காக அதன் விளக்கம் புரிகிறீர்கள் செய்வச்செய்யும். இப்படுத்து நிகழ்ச்சி நெய்வாய்க்கப் பாதிக்கும் இதனால்: அதற்கு சமாதியும் செய்ய பல நிகழ்வேற்றுப்படும் விதமாயிருக்கும். அதை விளக்கும் நேரம் செய்வக்கோளும், அதற்கு சமாதியும் விளக்கும். இப்படுத்து செய்வக்கோளும் பேச்சு செய்வக்கோளும் நன்கு. பல்வேற்று நேரம்? காலத்தில் நன்கு?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aasiriyar</td>
<td>vaNakkam naam ippoRudu oru mukkiyamaana oru ceidiyaip paRRippeca</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Teacher Greetings. Now we would like to talk about some important news. You would have probably heard about nature. Nature does good to us; at the same time, it causes a lot of harm. We cannot come to the conclusion that it was a bad incident, but rather it was an act of nature. An incident like this happened last year in the world. Does anyone know? What is the incident?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2. மாணவர்</th>
<th>அதுதான் சுனாமி.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>maaNavar</td>
<td>Student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3. ஆசிரியர்</th>
<th>மாணவர். மியது சந்றாய் காணலாம் போன்ற பொருளாதாராக வரும் பொழுது பொருளாதாரா பொழுது மாணவர்களுக்கு என்ன விளக்கினார்?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher continues with WT</td>
<td>Teacher uses WT only</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aasiriyar</td>
<td>m. cunaami, inda cunaami enRa colla-paTukinRa oru iyaRkaippeeriTar poona varudam naTantatu. engee naTantatu, engee aarampittatu enRa yaarukkaavadu teriyumaa?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Mm... Tsunami. A natural disaster known as a tsunami occurred last year. Does anyone know where it happened? Where it started?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. maanavar</td>
<td>இந்தியாவில்.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student</td>
<td>In Indonesia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. aasiriyar</td>
<td>Indone-sivile aarampittataaka colki-Riirkal. cari ankiruntu anta cunaami enRa oru... iyaRkaip peeriTar eerpattup pala pakutikalaip paatittatu. atu yaarukkaavatu teriyumaa ententa pakutika-laip paatittatu enRa?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>You say that it started from Indone-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
sia. Okay. From there, the natural disaster called the tsunami occurred and affected many areas. Does anyone know what areas it affected?

6. **Mānavar:** சிலைப்பக்க.
**Student:** Sri Lanka (Sri Lanka)

**Country’s name is in WT. It is same in the SST too.**

**Excerpt 2**
At the same time, sometimes the students’ language also influences that of the teacher. In Excerpt 2, the teacher repeats the students’ answer, ‘form fill up’ *pannoom* (we filled up the forms) and uses a few more English terms.

1. **Aaciriyar:** போனா வாரம் என்ன எச்சங்கனு ஞாபகம் இருக்கா?
**Teacher:** Do you remember what you did last week?

2. **Mānavarkāl:** form fill up *pannoom*
**Students:** We filled up the form

**Teacher uses mostly SST**

**Students used SST with code mixing in English**
There are currently about 700 Tamil teachers working in Singapore schools (Nalluraj, 2012; MOE, 2012). After the closure of the only Tamil High School in 1982 (Ramiah, 1998), the teachers who are enlisted into Tamil teaching received bilingual education. About 150 teachers who are native speakers recruited from India to work here as Tamil teachers are mostly assigned in Secondary schools and Junior Colleges. Those who were born and brought up in Singapore and studied Tamil as a second language are relatively young and enthusiastic about upgrading their academic qualifications. During the interview, many of these young teachers generally want to teach in SST and engage their students by equipping them with aural and oral skills. Being in this position, they greatly motivate students from English-speaking homes who struggle to speak Tamil via SST. One of them told that, “speaking in Standard Spoken Tamil is easy and not stressful. Students are also happy to listen and answer without fear!” This also surfaced in one of the focus group discussions in another study in which the author was also involved (2006). Hence in the early primary classes, we witness the use of SST as an encouraging situation.
Excerpt 3
In Excerpt 3, the student asks a question using SST. When teachers encourage the use of SST, students are less afraid to ask questions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1.</th>
<th>மாணவர்</th>
<th>என்ன உண்டு அளித்தர் என்ன இன்று எசால்தரப் போரினக?</th>
<th>Fluent use of SST</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>maNavar</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Teacher, today what is the name of the lesson that you are going to teach?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Excerpt 4
At the same time, they are very confident in talking to the teacher and initiating the conversation. This is apparent in Excerpt 4.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1.</th>
<th>மாணவர்:</th>
<th>நீங்கதான் ஆசிரியராச்ச, நீங்க சரியாத்தான் எசால்வீங்க!</th>
<th>Fluent use of SST</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>maNavar:</td>
<td>Student:</td>
<td>You are a teacher, so you will tell the correct things!</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Excerpt 5: Teacher is the role model
Generally in class, the Tamil teacher is speaking in SST. The teacher is the role model for the students. Sometimes students have difficulties, as they do not know the exact Tamil word for an English term. As they think in English and study most of their subjects in English, they use the English term in the midst of their Tamil speech. Especially Tamil students have difficulties in finding Tamil terms for a number of verbs in the Tamil classes. Copy is one such verb. In Excerpt 5, students use the word copy while talking about Amir. Here, if the teacher can understand the students’ situation and frequently use
the Tamil term for *copy* in subsequent lessons, then the Tamil term becomes familiar to students and subsequently they will use it in their speech.

1. **மாணவர்**: அமீர் காப்பிப்பண்ணுரா!
   
   Student: Amir copy *paNNuRaa*
   
   **One English word and one SST word**

2. **அசிரியர்**: இல்ல. . . அவர் எசாந்தமாதா எழுதுறாரு பாத்துக்ேகாங்க அவர் எப்படி எழுதுறான் கவனிங்க . . . எழுதிட்டீங்களா சரி
   
   Teacher: No. He is writing on his own. See, observe him how he is writing. Have you written? Ok.
   
   **Mostly SST**

At times, teachers too use English terms. Here we could ask whether Tamil teachers should use English words in the class. Although the answer is no, in a multilingual, globalised country, current teachers who have gone through English-medium education have limited content knowledge in Tamil and Tamil vocabulary and thus do not know the exact Tamil term for some English words.
Excerpt 6
In Excerpt 6, the teacher used words like ‘group’ and ‘correct’ in the midst of their Tamil speech. Sometimes these words also register well in their minds and they use them in their lessons. For these teachers, the content-oriented degree programme in Tamil is very useful in equipping them with the Tamil language.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Tamil</th>
<th>English</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>ஆசிரியர்: ஆ. . . ரம்பம். ரம்பம் கிழக்கு! கிழக்கு ஒன்று! சரி இங்கு!</td>
<td>Teacher: Starting. Starting. Ok. From here.</td>
<td>Teaching vocabulary. Except that word, teacher uses SST</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>aaciriyar: aa. . rambam. aarambam. cari, onRu! cari. inka iruntu.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher: aarambam(starting). Ok. onRu(one). From here.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>மாணவர்கள்: ஆ. . . லயம்</td>
<td>Students: aa. . . layam</td>
<td>Teaching vocabulary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>maaNavarkaL:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>aa. . layam(Temple).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>ஆசிரியர்: ஆ. . . லயம் இரண்டு. இந்த குரூப்புல இருந்து! நிஷாந்;</td>
<td>Teacher: Temple. Two. From this group. Nishanth.</td>
<td>Teaching the following two nouns: aa ... layam (Temple). Irandu (two)...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>aaciriyar: aa. . layam. iraNTu. Inta group-la iruntu! Nishanth</td>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher uses Group-la (the group) instead of KuRuvula</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher: Temple. Two. From this group. Nishanth.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>ஆசிரியர்: ஆ. . . பம் ஆ. . .</td>
<td>Teacher is teach-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| aaciriyar: | பபம் ஆ.  பபம் கானல் கி குண்டு சின்ன முதுகி!  
cari. moonRu. Inga irirndu! | ing vocabulary by repeating same word.

| Teacher | Indian pancake. .. Indian pancake. .. Indian pancake. .. Correct.  
Three. From here. | Mostly teacher uses SST and one English word

\[aa..ppam \text{ (Indian pan cake made by rice); moonRu (three).}\]

**Excerpt 7**

In Excerpt 7, the teacher mostly uses SST and otherwise she uses written Tamil terms that are mainly nouns. For example, \textit{taal} (paper), \textit{aintee ainntu} (only five), \textit{onRu} (one), \textit{iranTu} (two), \textit{naanku} (four), \textit{kuru talaivarkaL} (team leaders). Here, they do not use Standard Spoken Tamil to tell the numbers. It might be their orientation in school and they continue with that trend without changing to Spoken Spoken Tamil. Here the teacher needs to be conscious of what he or she is saying in class, as they are role models for their students. At the same time, in Singapore teachers also use the term \textit{potti} for the spoken Tamil term \textit{petti}, which means box. In the past, people from India came with a box (trunk) and the whole community called it \textit{potti} instead of \textit{petti}. For paper, they do not use \textit{kaayitam} as used in Tamil Nadu, but the WT word \textit{taal}. In Tamil, in some places in Singapore, however, the WT word is used in SST. For example, book is called \textit{pustakam} in India. But in Singapore, the WT word, \textit{puttakam} is used in SST. Currently, second language educated Tamil youths use the WT words for SST.
|———|———|
| Teacher | No question. For me the group leaders only come here. Hold this. Nishanth, wait, I will |
come. Meekaan, wait I will come. Meekaan, wait I will come. Now your group leaders are giving a paper to you. Have you received it? Have you taken your pencil?

2. மாணவர்கள்:  அமா...  
maaNarvaKal:  Aamaa  
Students:  Yes

3. ஆசிரியர்:  பெயர் எழுதியாச்சா?  
aaciriyar:  peyar eRutiyaaccaa?  
Teacher:  Have your written your name?  
Ok. You need to write only five sums. One, two three, four.. The date is on the board. Have you seen it?
Excerpt 8: Use of both varieties in the class
Here the teacher uses the word one which in spoken Tamil as onnu. It shows that the teacher is able to use both varieties in the class. Also, she is speaking interestingly to the students. She said, “I haven’t put appam” which means she hasn’t cooked appam. But the lesson is on aappam which has a long vowel at the start of the word. But the student used the word with the short vowel in front. With her answer, the student will be able to correct his mistake in pronouncing the word correctly.

Excerpt 9
Here in Excerpt 9, the teacher use the English word to evaluate whether the students have understood her question. So the teacher used aaN (male) means boy or girl? The students answered boy. The excerpt shows that the teacher’s language is the model for the students. In this excerpt, the teacher uses WT and the students follow his style and answering in WT.
<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>means</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Boy or girl?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>மாணவர்கள்:</td>
<td>Boy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>maaNavarkaL:</td>
<td>Boy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Students:</td>
<td>Boy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Students answer, ‘boy’.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>ஆசிரியர்:</td>
<td>Boy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>aaciriyar:</td>
<td>Boy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Teacher says it is correct.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Excerpt 10**

Tamil teachers are the gate keepers of the language and role models for the students to use that language. Teachers too understand their challenges in using SST in class. They sometimes, try to use the literal translation for the English words in their lessons. If they use it every day and make it as a regular word for the students to use, then they will remember it. In Excerpt 10, the teacher used, *paLLippai* for school bag (*paLLi*= school, *pai*=bag).

|   | ஆசிரியர்: | கசி உக்காருங்க.
| 1. | aaciriyar: | cari ukkaarunka |
| 1. | Teacher: | ok. Sit down |
| 1. | SST has been used |

|   | ஆசிரியர்: | கசி சம்பாரை பல்லைப் பையைத் தவறாலே கத்தைய? கரீ. கவனிக்கணும். |
| 2. | Teacher: | Ok. Have you placed your school bag on the floor? OK. See here. |
| 2. | SST has been used. Also, literal translation of English term in Tamil has been used. |
**Excerpt 11**
When students use English words, the teachers ask the class for the Tamil word or meaning. Through this, the teacher encourages the class to learn, understand, and use the corresponding Tamil words for English terms. Here, it is encouraging that students know the Tamil words for the English words.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Student use SST and English word ‘birthday’.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>maaNavi: It looks like my birthday is coming.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>aaciriyai: At the same time, she asks the Tamil term for ‘birthday’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Students give Tamil translation for ‘birthday’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Teacher generally uses</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Excerpt 12
Teacher’s encouragement and advice is helpful to students to speak Tamil during the group activity. Here the teacher told them to speak Tamil during the group activity.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. ஆசிரியம்</th>
<th>நீங்கவந்து ஆஹ். . .</th>
<th>Generally the teacher is using SST</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher:</td>
<td>It looks like a birthday is coming to you. Correct, Sweetha.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

AACIRIYAI:

piRantanaal varaa maatiri irukku unakku cari Sweetha

SST
| Teacher: | **माणवार्काळ:**
Teacher: | **aaniriyar:**
Teacher: |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>You are all going to paste the names and pictures. Ok. You have to paste one letter like this. First you do it. Then I will see how you are going to complete the task. But, very important, you have to talk in which language?</strong></td>
<td><strong>niinga vantu Aah illa. anta peerkaLaiyum, anta paTankaLaiyum vantu ottappooriinka. cariyaa? . . . . . . . . .oru eRutta inta maatiri otta reenTum, cariyaa? enta kuRu cariyaa celRaanka? mutalla cenci muTikkiRaanka. appaTinnu naa paarkkapooReen. Aana rompa mukkiyamaa niinga enna moRila peecaNum.</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **Students:**
| ** dalam Tamil**
| Tamil |
| **aaniriyar:**
Teacher: | **tamiRla peecaNum. appuRam canTai pooTakkuTatu. paarkkaalaam.** |
| **Teacher:**
| **Speak in Tamil. Then, don’t fight. Let’s see.** |
**Excerpt 13**

Excerpt 13 demonstrates Tamil students who are able to speak in SST to the Tamil teacher. The students answered well in Tamil.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Tamil</th>
<th>Translation</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1.  | மாணவர்: நான் கூறினேன் ஒரு மிருகம். அது விட்டு வளங்காதது.  
Teacher and students speak in SST. |
|     | maaNavar: student: nari vantu oru mirukam. ata viitla vaLakka muTiyaatu. |
|     | Fox is an animal. We could not rear it at home. |
| 2.  | ஆசிரியர்: ஏன் அது விட்டு வளங்காதது?  
Teacher: |
|     | aaciriyar: Teacher: een ata viitla vaLakka muTiyaatu? |
|     | Why couldn't we rear it at home? It also looks pretty. |
| 3.  | மாணவர்: நான் அழகா இல்லை.  
Student: |
|     | maaNavar: Student: Nari aRakaai illee |
|     | Fox is not pretty |
| 4.  | ஆசிரியர்: அழகா இல்லையா?  
Teacher: |
|     | aaciriyar: Teacher: aRakaai illaiyaa? |
|     | Not pretty? |
| 5.  | மாணவர்: எனக்கு கருப்பு நிறம்.  
Student: |
<p>|     | maaNavar: Nari karrupsu nilam |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student:</th>
<th>புடிக்காது. aanaa nari aRakaave irukku. aanaa aRakaa illa. eenaa nari vantu karuppu nittula irukku. enakku karuppu niram puTikkaatu. But fox is pretty. But not pretty. Because fox is black. I don’t like black.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6. ஆசிரியர்: aaciriyar: Teacher:</td>
<td>கருப்பு நிறத்து இர்க்காய? கீழிலே பிளப்பாயா? உனக்குப் பிடிக்காதா? சரி. mukkiyamaa een nariya viitla vaLakka miTyaatu You do not like it because it is in black. Ok, why we could not rear the fox at home?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. மாணவர்: maaNavar Student:</td>
<td>தோட்டம் பாய்க்கும் நிற்னாரம் romba payamaa irukkum Very scary</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Excerpt 14
When asked about the students’ Standard Spoken language in Tamil class, Primary school teachers told that generally they have to teach SST to some students who are from English-speaking homes. Among them, some have studied Tamil in kindergarten and they have known WT. Students from Tamil speaking homes are able to speak in Tamil language. Excerpt 14 shows that teachers are the role models for their students. If they start speaking in SST, students will follow them and for those who need, teacher can provide help.

้าசிரியர் 1:
இப்பாபா பிள்ளாக்கங்கு நல்லா தமிழ் பொற்றுக்கொள்கின்றன. பின்னர் அப்பா அம்மா பொற்று இல்லை நடைமுறைக்குச் செய்கின்றன. முன்னர் இதுவும் பெருந்தூத்து பொற்று இன்றுவாக்கிக் கொள்ளினால்

Teacher 1:
Now children are speaking Tamil well. If father, mother speak Tamil at home, it will be more good. Current text books and activities also helpful.

้าசிரியர் 2:
பொற்று பெருந்தூத்து பொற்று மணவர் கேளாடுகிறது நல்லா ஆர்வமா பிள்ளாக்களும் சந்தாசமா பொற்று வகுப்பைப் பொற்று நல்லாருக்கும். தமிழுடைய எச்சரையூட்டு எச்சரையூட்டு ஆண்டுது தமிழ் பொற்று
If we talk to the students with interest, they too speak happily. Class is also fun. For students who cannot speak in English, I will teach in English and later ask them to tell it in Tamil.

The teacher also needs to use differentiated instructional approach to teach SST to different groups of students. However, during group activities, the native speakers who are expatriate Tamil students provided assistance to the other students to learn and understand SST. With the movie clips, local Singaporean Tamil dramas, and television programmes, teachers can infuse interest in listening and speaking SST among students.

Generally, we find that both the teacher and the students use SST. Both groups are doing well and enjoying the language in the class. However, the teacher is the role model for the students’ language use. English words are there when the class or teacher is not sure about the correct Tamil word. The students are confident in answering the teacher and expressing their opinions and are able to self-correct their pronunciation or vocabulary. The teacher regularly clarifies her comments and students’ answers so that students understand the lesson. This is a positive trend in the Tamil class as the teacher motivates students and enables them to speak freely (Pohan, 2003; Zeichner, 1993) while meeting the objectives of the lesson.

After the 2005 Tamil language curriculum and pedagogy review committee’s report, SST play an important role in the Tamil classroom. From 2008 onwards, the new syllabus, textbooks, and teacher training provided scaffolding to SST in Tamil classrooms. Community organizations and media played additional roles to encourage and educate the community to use Tamil at home and public domains when they meet another Tamil. Through this, there is a greater awareness and strong impact in the students Tamil language use in
Tamil classrooms. However, there still are some doubts and confusion among teachers, parents and students.

Several other observations that emerge during the study:

- When students do not know a Tamil word, they tend to use the English term.
- Expatriate students are resourceful in carrying on sustained conversations in SST.
- Teachers are generally keen on using SST during oral discussions, but at times they use English or WT. Teachers who have recently completed pre-service and in-service training consciously use SST in their class with fewer WT and English terms.
- Among secondary school teachers, SST is used in nearly 80% of all classroom interactions, while 20% of the discourse is conducted in WT. The lessons are mostly focused on examinations with heavy content and archaic language. In one primary school Tamil class, the teacher used a large number of WT terms because the students had been most exposed to that variety.
- WT terms are most often used when teachers repeat their students’ answers.
- When teachers use ICT, interesting stories and task-based activities, students are happy to speak in SST variety.
- Scaffolding and use of prior knowledge encourages students to speak in SST.
- Teachers use code mixing when they would like to facilitate discussion with the students without disturbing the flow of the lesson. Students use code mixing when they do not know the correct Tamil word for the particular English noun or verb.
- Some teachers incorporated colloquial terms in their discourse.

The author interviewed some of the students for this study. When she asked them about the use of SST in the Tamil class, the students said that they were happy to use it and they hoped to do well in their written examinations which are generally given in WT. The first cohort that had gone through the new syllabus and curriculum materials sat for their Primary School Leaving Examination in 2010. The results of their MTL Examination have shown the impact of SST use
in the classrooms. After the release of the results, the teachers were interviewed by the author. They said that they were happy with the results. At the lower primary classes, it is obvious that students are happy to use SST in class especially when there is good rapport and understanding between teachers and students. However, the students wish to use the Internet, iPad, iBook and Web 2.0 instead of paper-based materials for their lessons. In addition, they would like to have the lessons using age-related themes such as rap singers, movie actors, young leaders, meaningful Tamil cultural practices, traditional celebrations, Tamil youngsters from Tamil diaspora communities and their ideal people from various domains instead of ancient kings, serious science and culture-based lessons. For lower primary students, they prefer more stories, songs, animated movies and prior knowledge based lessons.

**Conclusion and Recommendations**

After the in-depth emphasis for SST adoption in teacher training and the implementation of the Review Committee Report (MOE 2005), there has been a development and positive impact on the use of SST in Tamil classrooms. With the constant use of both SST and WT, students will be able to understand the differences between the two varieties and develop their skills in both varieties. For that, it is imperative to use SST in the written form instead of WT. When it comes to stories and speech bubbles, textbooks need to have a different script for SST and it will add value in the learning of Tamil. In the Tamil class, the dialogic teaching (Alexander, 2010) and constant engagement with the content has to be developed for students to develop higher-order skills and vocabulary. For that, authentic task-based teaching and learning is essential. Introducing authentic activities and authentic assessment (Gopinathan, 2000) will help students to learn about their ethnicity, culture and language. If teachers use authentic task-based teaching and encourage task-based learning, the use of SST will increase as there are no opportunities for Tamil students to use their SST in the multilingual community. Also, as Senior Minister of State, Ministry of Trade and Industry and Ministry of Education Mr Iswaran (2010) mentioned, many students come from English-speaking homes. They have opportunities to use SST in their classroom only. In that classroom too, it is inevitable to provide sup-
port to the students’ vocabulary to build their confidence in using Tamil. Hence, teachers need to provide ample input and supportive opportunities to their students. The Tamil syllabus also needs to be changed to include pictures, discussions, and culture that encourage the use of listening and oral skills.

Tamil in Singapore needs to develop a niche for itself. The ecology of Tamil language teaching and learning in the past 20 years shows that the educational community in Singapore is changing towards the teaching of a second language. Yet some students are having difficulty in speaking in SST because of English speaking home background. Here it is time to profile them based on their home language and provide them more help to find fun in speaking SST. With the continued support from the government, constant effort from the teachers, and encouragement to the students, we can assure that Tamil language will be a living language in Singapore. Through this, Singapore can develop itself as a hub for second language teaching and learning for Tamil and provide its experience and expertise to the Tamil diaspora in the United States, Europe, Australia and New Zealand.

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