

Estate Tamil: a new variety of Tamil

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Abstract

Sri Lanka (then Ceylon) was under the British Empire for about 150 years. The British brought about many changes. Linguistically, they are responsible for two major issues: firstly, they introduced English to Sri Lanka, secondly, they paved the path for the introduction of "Indian Tamil", a variety of Tamil spoken in Tamil Nadu. In Sri Lanka, "Indian Tamil" has been spoken mainly by the labourers, brought to Sri Lanka by the British planters (or by their agents), and their decendents. In Sri Lanka, over several decades, (Estate Tamil) ET evolved independently. Therefore, it differs from Sri Lankan Tamil (SLT), spoken in northern and eastern parts of the country, as well as Tamil spoken in (South) India. The differences occur at every level of the language: phonology, morphology and syntax. SLT differs from Tamil spoken in Tamil Nadu (Indian Tamil) as it has retained several archaic features. Hence, obviously, (Indian Tamil) IT contrasts with SLT. Yet, until recently ET and Tamil spoken in India were considered to be the same. As a result, the differences between ET and Indian Tamil were not noticed. Therefore, some considered these two varieties as the same. This paper is an attempt to exhibit some distinctive features in ET and show that ET and IT are not identical. It discusses two main aspects of ET. First, it elaborates the sociolinguistic facts that caused the independent evolution of ET. Second, it discusses the distinctiveness of ET.

Introduction

Tamil is a member of the Dravidian language family, spoken mainly in Tamil Nadu, South India. It consists of several dialects based on social and geographical differences. Socially, Tamil has two main dialects. The high or formal variety is used on formal occasions, in literary works, in the media and in public discussions. It is rigid and evolves very slowly compared to the informal variety. The low or informal variety is exercised on informal occasions, in communicating with family members and close associates. Tamil has also several geographical dialects. These are mainly related to the colloquial form of the language and spoken in South India, and several other countries, like Sri Lanka, South Africa, Malaysia, Singapore, the West Indies, where the former British Empire had its ruling power. Tamils migrated to the countries which were under the British Empire and are members of linguistic community of these countries.

Spoken Tamil is not the same where it is spoken. For example, the term Indian Tamil spoken in south India does not represent one, homogenous entity, but it represents more than one dialect used within the region. It is the same with Tamil spoken in Sri Lanka. Tamil used in Sri Lanka can broadly be classified into three major categories.

Sri Lankan Tamil

Indian Tamil

Moor Tamil.

The term Sri Lankan Tamil represents the dialects spoken in North, Northeastern, Northwestern, and Southeastern parts of the country. Moor Tamil is spoken by the Moor community spread all over the country. There could be sub-dialects within this category. Indian Tamil is the mother tongue of Tamils who live and work mainly in tea and rubber plantations. They are the descendents of the labourers brought to Sri Lanka by the British or their agents to work in the tea and rubber plantations. The dialect spoken by these Tamils has been called Indian Tamil as these speakers are of Indian origin. Further, this variety was also called "Coolie Tamil" (Tamil spoken by labourers), "tooTTat tamil" (Estate (plantation) Tamil), and malait tamil (Tamil in tea plantations) as the speakers were labourers in plantations.

It is generally assumed that Indian Tamil, spoken in Sri Lanka, is identical with Indian Tamil, spoken in India. The primary objective of the present paper is to argue that this assumption is not correct and hence not acceptable. The organization of the paper is as follows. Sections 2 and 3 briefly describe the methodology used and give an overview of the relevant literature. Section 4 is devoted to illustrate the sociolinguistic aspects of ET. The main aim of this section is to highlight that ET has evolved freely, away from Indian Tamil spoken in the motherland. Consequently, ET has developed its identity. Section 5 exhibits some specific features found in ET. Concluding remarks are given in section 6.

Methodology

This is a structural analysis of Estate Tamils. The data described here were gathered from Haputale divisional secretariat in Badulla district of Sri Lanka. The informants were randomly selected from several estates in Haputale. For example, Velan is from Kelburn division of Totalagala Estate in Haputale, and Sigaravelu from Hapugahawatta Estate at Diyatalawa. They were asked to tell stories, engage in discussion on various aspects of religion, culture, politics etc. The data were recorded and transcribed, and analysed on the basis of Structuralist theory. The examples given here are mainly from M. Velan and (the late) A. Singaravelu. Indian Tamil data are from Suseendirajah (1975), Asher (1982) and Asher (2002).

Literature review

As mentioned in the introduction, the variety of Tamil spoken by Indian plantation workers in Sri Lanka was considered to be identical with Tamil spoken in South India. The main reason seems to be the fact that these people are the descendents of Indian migrants who came or were brought to Sri Lanka during the second half of the 19th Century and the first half of the 20th Century. Due to this assumption, researchers focused their attention to analyse Sri Lankan Tamil spoken in Northern and Eastern parts of the country. The variety spoken in these areas was in some instances referred to as Ceylon Tamil or Sri Lanka Tamil. But on other occasions,

writers have specifically mentioned the dialect that they have analysed. In many cases the studies were carried out on the Jaffna dialect of Tamil, and in a few cases research work was done on Batticaloa Tamil and other varieties of Tamil. For example, Suseendirarajah (1970), (1976) (1978), (1981), (1981b), (1982), Thananjayarajasingham (1972), (1974) discuss Jaffna Tamil. Suseendiraraja (1973) is a discussion of Batticaloa Tamil. The variety analysed in Suseendiraraja (1966) is called Ceylon Tamil, whereas the variety studied in Suseendiraraja (1973b), (1973c), (1974), (1975), and Thananjayarajasingham (1972b) is Sri Lanka Tamil. There are only two studies on Estate Tamil. Nagita (1988) is a linguistic analysis of Estate Tamil. It illustrates phonological and morphological aspects of this dialect. It also illustrates some differences found between Indian Tamil, Sri Lankan Tamil on one hand and Sri Lankan Tamil and Estate Tamil on the other. Nagita (1994) is a morpho-syntactic study of Estate Tamil. It explores the possibility of analysing deverbal nouns in Tamil using a syntactic theory and examines morphosyntactic properties of verbs and verbal nouns. There is no other structural and/or contrastive study of Estate Tamil. The present paper examines some properties of ET and will shed light on understanding the nature of this dialect of Tamil.

Estate Tamil: sociolinguistic perspective

The British rulers, once they took over the ruling power of Ceylon, initiated coffee plantations on the hill sides of the country. It required a substantial amount of labour, but due to various reasons the planters could not find enough labourers within the country and had to look for alternative ways. For their comfort, cheap labour was available in South India. As a result, the first batch of Indian Tamil labourers was brought to Sri Lanka in the 1830's. The Indian labourers who were motivated by the group leaders (called Kangani) or the agents arrived in Ceylon with the hope of a better living standards and better future. These people migrated to Ceylon during the harvesting period and returned once their duty was over. The coffee plantations were destroyed suddenly due to an epidemic and the planters turned to cultivate tea and rubber. These new plantations needed constant labour supply. In order to fulfil this new requirement labourers were brought to the

plantations. The planters' agent had a key role to play in this new venture. Many of the migrants started their journey from 'Tuttukudy' in South India. After they landed, they had to start a very difficult journey and had to face unfamiliar weather conditions and lifestyles. Due to various hardships many of them died before they reached the destination. For example, it is reported that about 70,000 were dead during 1841-49 A.D.. Those who survived were not fit to work in the plantations. These labourers were taken to different parts of the hill country such as Nuwara eliya, Ratnapura, Badulla and Matale, and they settled down there.

There was little freedom for these labourers. Settlements were established within the plantations and the labourers were forced to stay inside these settlements. These early settlers were prohibited from going out of the plantations. They had to work there and live there with the basic necessities provided on a loan basis by the agents or kanganis. Therefore, they did not get any opportunity to move with the local Sinhalese people. Some of these people earned for their family in India, and returned time to time to India to visit their family members. Later, when the number of the Indian labourers increased some of the labourers migrated to other plantations looking for better living standards. This could be done very easily with the written certificate called "pattu seettu" obtained from the superintendent of the estate where they lived

At the beginning the governments of India and Ceylon did not get involved in this migration process. Yet, with the establishment of the Coolie Immigration Agency in Ceylon and Recruitment agency in India both governments participated in this labour market. Indian migration continued up to 1950 and it created various new problems in the country.

In this way, the foreign power in Ceylon had a great effect on society. As far as the British rulers were concerned, they initiated Indian Tamil migration. This had its effect on the country's politics, economics and several other areas. Linguistically this is very significant as this was an introduction of a new variety of language, Tamil, to the country. It caused to enumerate the number of Tamil dialects in Sri Lanka. More importantly, this migration paved the path for language contact.

That is to say, that Tamil migrants arrived from various regions of Tamil Nadu. They were from different sociocultural and sociolinguistic backgrounds. For example, Kallars were from Pudu Kottey, Tanjavur and Mavattapuram. Vellalar were from Selam and Namakkal. They spoke different dialects or varieties of Tamil. For example, 'grand mother' for Pallars was "attay" whereas for Kudiyar it was "amma". Vellalas called their uncles "anjan", but Konars called the same "maamaa". When these people arrived Sri Lanka, they were put together in settlements disregarding their sociolinguistic dissimilarities. Thus, Tamils from different linguistic backgrounds had to live in one place. This was a good opportunity for language contact. It was also mentioned earlier that these labourers were allowed to move freely from one plantation to another according to their will. This internal migration also may have increased the opportunities for language contact. Further, these migrants have had an opportunity to mix with Tamils from Jaffna (and Trincomalee/Batticaloa) and with the Sinhala people. Some plantations are situated around Sinhala villages and there are plenty of opportunities for Indian Tamils to move with Sinhala people. Especially, after the tea and rubber plantations were peopled in 1975, people from the Sinhala community were also appointed as labourers, supervisors and officials. This has also increased the interaction between Tamil and Sinhala people. All these interrelationships definitely have had an effect on the evolution of Indian Tamil in Sri Lanka. Hence, one can expect differences between ET and Indian Tamil and cannot consider ET to be the same with Indian Tamil spoken in India. This point will be exemplified in the next section.

Estate Tamil: morphological and syntactic features

Estate Tamil has evolved freely in this country for more than a century. Therefore, differences can be found at every level of grammar; i.e. phonological, morphological and syntactic. Phonological differences were demonstrated in Wijeratne (in press). Therefore, some morphosyntactic properties of ET are illustrated in these sections.

5.1. Number

Nouns in ET are inflected for number attaching -kal to nominal roots. e.g.

	Singular	plural	
1.	sondakaaram	sondakaaranka(l)	relatives
	aalu	aaluka(l)	people

-aka is used as an alternative marker. Thus,

	Singular	plural	
2.	aalu	aalunka	people
	poNNu	poNNunka	women
	avan	avunka	they

-maar is used with nouns referring to superiors to indicate politeness/respect. -kal follows -maar.

	Singular	plural	
3.	maaman	maamanmaaruka(l)	uncles
	nanpan	nanpanmaaruka(l)	friends

In this context -unga or -inga is used in Indian Tamil. Further, in Indian Tamil -ka, -gã, -o, uo, are used as plural markers. But they do not appear in ET.

Plural suffixes are generally added to nominal roots directly. However, at least in one instance the plural suffix in ET attaches to the oblique base of nouns with final -Du. Thus,

4.	viiDu + kal	>	viiTTukal.
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5.2. Personal Pronouns

Personal pronouns in ET are given below.

5.			Singular	plural
	First person	Nominative	naan	naanka (Inclusive)
		Oblique base	en	enka(l)
		Nominative		naama/namma (exclusive)
		Oblique base		nama/namma(l)
	Second person	Nominative	niinka (polite)	niinka
		Oblique base	onka(l)	nka(l)
		Nominative	nii (to inferiors/close associates)	—
		Oblique base	on	
	Third person			
		Masculine	avaru	avunka(l)
		Feminine	(avunka)	avunka (l)
		Neuter	adu	(aduka(l))
			idu	(iduka(l))

These forms are similar to those of Indian Tamil. Nevertheless, the following third person forms of Indian Tamil do not occur in ET.

6.			Plural
	Third person		
		Masculine	Proximate ivanuo~ / ivanugã
			Remote avanuo~ / avanugã
			Polite avaruka(l)
		Feminine	Proximate ivaluo~ / ivalugã
			Remote avaluo~ / avalugã

genitive case. Thus, *avunga taay*, and *maame samsaara* mean 'his/her mother' and 'uncle's wife' respectively. These case suffixes are found in Indian and Jaffna dialects of Tamil. One peculiarity in ET is that it has *-uTTu* as a genitive marker. e.g.

9. *eevuTTu* 'my',
maappilavuTTu 'of bridegroom'.

This characteristic is not found in either Indian Tamil or Jaffna Tamil.

5.4. Verbal inflections

Verbs in ET, like those in any other dialect, are inflected for number, person, and tense. Tense is morphologically marked. Present tense markers are *-r*, *-kir*, and *-kkir*. For future *-p-* and *-v-* are used depending on the verb category. Person and number markers are as follows.

10.		Singular	plural
	First person	-een	-am/o~
	Second person (Polite)	-iinka(l)	-iinka(l)
	(non-polite)	-aa(y)	
	Third person		
	Masculine	-aan/-aaru	-aanka(l)
	Feminine	(-aank(l))	-aanka(l)
	Neuter	-atu	-atu

These are, except the third person neuter plural, identical with the inflectional markers found in Indian Tamil. The third person neuter plural *-atunka(l)* is used in Indian Tamil. But it does not occur in ET. These person number markers indicate agreement between subject and verb. Thus,

11. *naan kuDukkireen*
 I drink-present-1st person
 I drink (something)

12. sari taa-r-een.
o.k. give-present.-1st person
Yes, I give.
13. naanka vaa-r-am.
We come-present-1st person plural
We (will) come.
14. avaru varu-v-aaru.
he come-future-3rd singular
He will come.
15. avunga koDu-pp-aanka.
They give-future-3rd person plural.
They will give.

However, there are instances where this agreement between subject and verb does not hold. Consequently, all pronominal pronouns occur with the third person neuter singular verb form.

16. ada patti naan enna taan nānay-kkir-atu.
that about I what emph. Think-present.-3rd person singular
What do I think about that..?
17. namma daanam kuDu-kkir-atu taane.
we offerings give-present-3rd person singular-emphatic
We offer offerings, Don't we?
18. niinka panam paDI-kkir-atu. anta maari
You sermon study-present-3rd person singular that way
You give sermon, in that way...
19. aampula aalu pompula maariya sooDI-kkir-atu.
man woman like dress-present-3rd singular
A man dresses like a woman.

20. puusaari varu-v-atu.
puusaari come-future-3rd person singular
Pusari will come.
21. muunu peeru nānay-kkir-atu
three person think-present-3rd singular
Three persons think (about that)
22. avunga kuDi-kkir-adu.
they drink-present-3rd person singular
They drink.

The difference between these sentences with third person neuter -atu form and the sentences with proper agreement seem to be that the latter express some sort of definiteness. This type of agreement pattern does not occur in Indian Tamil and seems to be a peculiar characteristic of Estate Tamil. This shows that ET has developed some characteristics unknown to other dialects of Tamil.

5.5. Use of ellaam

Ellaam means all, non-human. Ellaarum is used to indicate all humans. This distinction seems to be fading away from ET. There are many cases where ellaam is used to represent all humans.

23. ellaam saappiDu-v-aanka.
all eat-future-3rd person plural
All will eat.
24. ellaam iru-pp-aanka.
all be-future-3rd person plural
All will be there.

5.6. Politeness

-nka(l) is a politeness marker in Tamil and is used in imperative expressions like vaa-nka 'please come' to indicate a polite request in contrast to vaa 'come' (to

inferiors or impolite form). This usage can be seen in ET as well. ET speakers further employ -nka(1) at the end of a sentence to express politeness towards the addressee. For example,

25. aamaa-nka
yes-polite
yes
26. sivanum iisparanum onnu taan-gal-ee
Sive and iisvara and one emphatic.-polite-emphatic.
Sive and Isvara are only one, Isn't it?
27. sari-nkal-aa
yes-polite-question
Is it o.k.?
28. viiTT-ukku konDuvara kuuD-aat-u-nkal-aa?
home-datative. bring allow-negative-final-polite-question
It is prohibited to bring into the home? Isn't it?
29. atu vara-v-ee var-aat-u-nga.
it come-v-emphatic come-negative-final-polite
It never comes.

This usage is not customary in Indian Tamil and hence represents a peculiarity in ET.

5.7. Lexical Differences

ET has evolved freely away from Indian Tamil in the mainland. As mentioned in section 4 plantations are surrounded by Sinhala speaking areas and there is plenty of opportunity for language contact. As noted there Tamil speakers from various regions in the motherland were put together and had to live together. Therefore, there was more opportunity for language contact. Consequently, it is natural to expect lexical differences between ET and Indian Tamil. There could be dozens

of lexical differences in these language varieties. Only two examples are given for the moment.

30. ankana 'there'
ankuTTu 'there'

Lexical differences are seen in postpositions too. For example, in ET maari 'like' is used instead of maatiri in Indian Tamil.

Conclusion

This paper has so far illustrated two major aspects of ET. On the one hand that the sociolinguistic background which surrounds ET speakers induces language change and innovations. Therefore, one can assume distinctiveness in ET. On the other hand, actually there are peculiarities at every level of grammar in this variety of Tamil. This evidence compels one to discard the assumption that ET and Indian Tamil are identical and treat ET as a separate dialect or variety of Tamil. This hypothesis would prove to be correct if a large scale dialect survey and research on ET are carried out.

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