

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 Agasthalingom (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, Trinaveli, Madurai, Arcot, and Chennai). Although these dialectal 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 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 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 viRRuvittiirkaLaa? (*WT*)

niinka unka vittai 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 *velkiRaar* 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 கடைக்குச் செல்கிறார் (LT)
amma kaTaikekuc celkiRaar (LT)
2. அம்மா கடைக்குப் போகிறார் (WT)
amma kaTaikkuppookiRaar (WT)
3. அம்மா கடைக்குப் போறாங்க (SST)
amma kaTaikkeu pooRaanka (SST)
4. அம்மா கடிக்கிப் போவது (CT)
amma kaTikki poovutu (CT)
5. அம்மா கடைக்குப் போறா (a dialect used by newly immigrated Tamil expatriates)
amma kaTaikkuppooRaa
6. அம்மா கடைக்கு போறானி (a non-standard spoken Tamil used by teenage students)
amma kaTaikkeu pooRaani
7. அம்மா கடைக்கு goingறானி (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

மெக்‌டோனல்ட்ஸ்ல போய் நல்லா

கொட்டிக்கோங்க (CT)

McDonald'sla *pooi nalla kottikkoonka* (CT)

2. We won't eat anything in the night

ராவைக்கி நாம ஒன்னும் தின்னமாட்டோம் (CT)

raavaikki naama tinnamaattoom (CT)

rattirikkeu naanka onnum caapiTamaattoom (SST)

In no. 1, Example 2, *kottikkoonka* is the colloquial term for the phrase 'eat well'. In SST, it is *caapiTunka*. For no. 2, the SST for the collo-

quial words *raavaikki* and *tinnamaatoom* are *raatthirikeku* (in the night) and *caapiTamaattom* (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.

¹ <http://www.moe.gov.sg/media/press/files/2011/mtl-review-report-2010.pdf>.

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 veLinnaTu 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

Year	Issues and recommendations
1996	Need awareness on SST and second language pedagogy
1999	Tamil lessons are difficult for students and the change of home language background
2004	Textbook reform, use of accessible language and link texts with assessment and use of IT
2005	Shift in home language background and difficulty for students to learn and write exams
2010	Use of IT and strengthening of the implementation of SST

Researchers have provided feedback that spoken language should be emphasized in classrooms. A number of research studies (Annamalai 2011; Asher, 1982; Ferguson, 1972; Mahizhnan, 1996; Mani & Gopinathan, 1983; Ministry of Education, 2005; Ramiah, 1991, 2002; Saravanan, 1989, 1998; Saravanan, Lakshmi, & Caleon, 2007; Schiffman, 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 recommended 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 classrooms. Don Snow (1996:16) argues that learners need to amass sufficient vocabulary in reading text and listening to speech in order to develop a solid foundation in that culture. After the curriculum review 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 expatriate 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 Vasantham 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, *uNNaamal* (without eating), *alikkaama* (without giving), *kaanp-pikkiraTu* (it shows) and the nouns *mannanai* (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

என்னோட உணவை தருவேன்

ennooTa uNavai taruween

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

அவர் உண்ணாமல் அவர்ட்ட கொடுத்துட்டு
அவர் எப்போதும் நல்ல பண்புகளை வளர்ப்பார்னு
அவர்ட்ட கொடுக்குறாங்க

*avar uNNaamal avarakitta koTuttu avar eppotum nalla paNpu-
kakai valarppaarnu avarakitta koTukkuRaanka*

3. It did not benefit

பயனும் அளிக்காமப் போயிட்டு

payanum aLikkaama poyittu

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

மன்னனை காண்பிக்கிறது என்று
நினைக்கிறேன். ஆங்.

mannanai kaanppikkiratu enru ninaikkireen. Aang.

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.

1.	ஆசிரியர்	<p>வணக்கம் நாம் இப்பொழுது ஒரு முக்கியமான ஒரு செய்தியைப் பற்றிப் பேச விரும்புகிறோம். நீங்கள் அநேகமாக அந்த இயற்கை பற்றிக் கேள்விப் பட்டிருப்பீர்கள். இயற்கை நமக்கு நல்லதையும் செய்கிறது; அதே சமயத்தில் நமக்கு பல தீங்குகளையும் விளைவிக்கிறது. அது தீங்கு என்று சொல்லமுடியாது, அது இயற்கையின் நிகழ்ச்சி. இப்படி ஒரு நிகழ்ச்சி போன வருடம் உலகத்தில் நடந்தது. யாருக்காவது தெரியுமா? என்ன நிகழ்ச்சி என்று?</p> <p><i>vaNakkam naam ippoRudu oru mukkiyamaana oru ceidiyaip paRRippeeca</i></p>	Generally the teacher uses WT
	<i>aasiriyar</i>		

	Teacher	<p><i>virumpukiRoom. niingkal aneekamaaka anta iyaRkai paRRik keeLvip pattiruppiirkaL. iyarkai namakkeu nallataiyum ceykiRatu. adee samayattil namakkeu pala tiingukaLaiyum viLaiivikkiratu. adu tiingu eNru solla muTiyaaTu. adu iyarkaiyin nikaRcci. ippaTi oru nikaRcci poona varuTam ulakattil naTantatu. yaarukaavatu teriyumaa? enna nikaRcci enRu?</i></p> <p>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?</p>	
2.	<p>மாணவர்</p> <p><i>maanavar</i></p> <p>Student</p>	<p>அதுதான் சுனாமி.</p> <p><i>atutaan cunaami.</i></p> <p>That was tsunami</p>	Teacher uses WT only
3.	ஆசிரியர்	<p>ம்.... சுனாமி. இந்த சுனாமி என்று சொல்லப்படுகின்ற ஒரு இயற்கைப் பேரிடர் போன வருடம் நடந்தது. எங்கே நடந்தது, எங்கே ஆரம்பித்தது என்று யாருக்காவது தெரியுமா?</p>	Teacher continues with WT

		sia. Okay. From there, the natural disaster called the tsunami occurred and affected many areas. Does anyone know what areas it affected?	
6.	மாணவர்: <i>maaNavar:</i> Student:	ஸ்ரீலங்கா. 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.	ஆசிரியர்: <i>aaciriyar:</i> Teacher:	போன வாரம் என்ன செஞ்சிங்கனு ஞாபகம் இருக்க? <i>poona vaaram enna cenchinkanu gnaapakam irukka?</i> Do you remember what you did last week?	Teacher uses mostly SST
2.	மாணவர்கள்: <i>maaNavarkaL:</i> Students:	form fill up பன்னோம் Form fill up <i>pannoom</i> We filled up the form	Students used SST with code mixing in English

3.	<p>ஆசிரியர்:</p> <p><i>aaciriyar:</i></p> <p>Teacher:</p>	<p>ஆமா form fill up பன்னிங்ங. ஆமா form பத்தி பேசுனோ இல்ல? Very stressful you know?.. சில மாணவர்கள் சரி சொல்லிட்டங்க ஆனா கையெழுத்துப் போடல.</p> <p><i>aamaa form fill up panniinka. aamaa form patti peecunoo illa? very stressful you know?. .cila maaNavarkaL cari collittaanga aanaa kaiyeRuttu pooTala</i></p> <p>Yes, you did fill out the form. Yes, we spoke about the form, right? You know, it was very stressful. Some students said ok, but have not signed it.</p>	<p>Teacher follows students' reply and used SST and code mixing in English</p>
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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.

1.	மாணவர்	என்னா ஆசிரியர், இன்னிக்கு என்ன சொல்லித்தரப் போறீங்க?	<i>Fluent use of SST</i>
	maaNavar	enna aaciriyar, innikku enna collitara pooRiinka?	
	<i>Student</i>	<i>Teacher, today what is the name of the lesson that you are going to teach?</i>	

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.

1.	மாணவர்:	நீங்கதான் ஆசிரியராச்சே, நீங்க சரியாத்தான் சொல்வீங்க!	<i>Fluent use of SST</i>
	maaNavar:	niinkataan aaciriyaraaccee, niinga cariyaataan colvinka!	
	<i>Student:</i>	<i>You are a teacher, so you will tell the correct things!</i>	

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: <i>maaNavar:</i> Student:	அமீர் காப்பிப்பண்ணுரா! <i>Amir copy paNNuRaa</i> Amir is copying	One English word and one SST word
2.	ஆசிரியர்: <i>aaciriyar:</i> Teacher:	இல்ல. . . . அவரு சொந்தமாதா எழுதுறாரு. பாத்துக்கோங்க அவர் எப்படி எழுதுறாருன்னு கவனிங்க. எழுதிட்டீங்களா? சரி <i>Illa avaru contamaataa eRutuRaaru. paattukkoongka. avar eppaTi eRutuRaa- runnu kavaningka. eRutittingkaLaa? cari.</i> 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.

1.	ஆசிரியர்: <i>aaciriyar:</i> Teacher:	ஆ. . . ரம்பம். ஆரம்பம் சரி ஒன்று! சரி இங்க இருந்து <i>aa. . . rambam. aarambam. cari, onRu! cari. inka iruntu. aa. . . rambam.(starting). aarambam(starting). Ok. onru(one). From here. .</i>	Teaching vocabulary. Except that word, teacher uses SST
2.	மாணவர்கள்: <i>maaNavarkaL:</i> Students:	ஆ. . . லயம் <i>aa. . . layam</i> <i>aa. . . layam (Temple).</i>	Teaching vocabulary
3.	ஆசிரியர்: <i>aaciriyar:</i> Teacher	ஆ. . . லயம் இரண்டு. . இந்த குரூப்புல இருந்து! நிஷாந்; <i>aa. . . layam. iraNTu. Inta group-la iruntu! Nishanth</i> Temple. . . Two . . . From this group. Nishanth.	Teaching the following two nouns: <i>aa. . . layam (Temple). Irandu (two)...</i> Teacher uses Group-la (the group) instead of <i>KuRuwnla</i>
4.	ஆசிரியர்:	ஆ. . ப்பம் ஆ. . .	Teacher is teach-

		<p>ப்பம் ஆ. . ப்பம் கரக்ட் சரி மூன்று இங்க இருந்து!</p> <p><i>aa. . ppam. Aa. . ppam. aa...ppam. Correct. cari. moonRu. Inga irundu!</i></p>	<p>ing vocabulary by repeating same word.</p> <p>Mostly teacher uses SST and one English word</p>
	Teacher	<p>Indian pancake. .. Indian pancake. . Indian pan cake. . Correct. Three . From here.</p>	<p><i>aa...ppam</i> (Indian pan cake made by rice); <i>muunRu</i> (three).</p>

Excerpt 7

In Excerpt 7, the teacher mostly uses SST and otherwise she uses written Tamil terms that are mainly nouns. For example, *taaL* (paper), *aintee ainntu* (only five), *onRu* (one), *iranTu* (two), *naanku* (four), *kurru 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 *potti* for the spoken Tamil term *petti*, which means box. In the past, people from India came with a box (trunk) and the whole community called it *potti* instead of *petti*. For paper, they do not use *kaayitam* as used in Tamil Nadu, but the WT word *taaL*. In Tamil, in some places in Singapore, however, the WT word is used in SST. For example, book is called *pustakam* in India. But in Singapore, the WT word, *puttakam* is used in SST. Currently, second language educated Tamil youths use the WT words for SST.

1.	<p>ஆசிரியர்:</p> <p><i>aaciriyar:</i></p> <p>Teacher</p>	<p>.....கேள்வியெல்லா இல்ல. . . எனக்கு அந்தக் குழு தலைவர்கள் எல்லாம் வாங்க. குழு தலைவர்கள் மட்டும் இங்க வாங்க! இதை புடி! நிஷந் இருங்க வரே! மேகான்! இருங்க வரே! மேகான்! இருங்க வரே! மேகான்! இப்ப உங்க குழு தலைவர்கள் ஒங்ககிட்ட ஒரு தாள் கொடுக்கறாங்க. கடைச்சதா? பேன்சில் எடுத்தாச்சா?..</p> <p>.....<i>keehiyella illa.</i><i>enakku antak kuRu talaivar-</i> <i>kaL ellaam vaanka. kuru talaivar-</i> <i>kaL mattum ingka vaangka! Itai</i> <i>puTi! Nisanth, irungka vareen!</i> <i>Mekaan! Irungka vareen! Mekaan</i> <i>irunka vareen! Mekaan! Ippa ung-</i> <i>ka kuRu talaivarkaL ongakaitta</i> <i>oru taaL koTukkiraangka. ka-</i> <i>Taiccataa? Pencil eTutaaccaa?</i></p> <p>No question. For me the group leaders only come here. Hold this. Nishanth, wait, I will</p>	<p>Generally teacher uses SST except the terms, <i>ku-</i> <i>Ru talai-</i> <i>varkaL</i> (team leaders). For the English word, 'pencil', it is the common term in Tamil, too.</p>
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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.

ஆசிரியர்: <i>aaci-riyar:</i> Teacher:	மேகன்! அப்பம் போடலைய நா. . . ன் Mekaan! <i>appam pooTalaya naa. . . n</i> Mekaan! I am not cooking appam!	Teacher is stressing on long vowel for the word, <i>appam</i> . <i>appam</i> is WT and <i>aappam</i> is SST
மாணவர்கள்: <i>maaNavarkaL:</i> Students:	ஆப்பம்!; <i>aappam</i> Indian Pancake	

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.

1.	ஆசிரியர்: <i>aaciriyar:</i> Teacher:	ஆண். ஆண். ஆண். னா? Boy girl? <i>aaN aaN aaN. .naa?</i> Boy, girl?	<i>aaN</i> is word which means ‘male’. Teacher is teaching words starts with vowel, aa. Here she repeats the word ‘aaN’ and asks the students whether the meaning is boy or girl?
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		Male male male. .means Boy or girl?	
2.	மாணவர்கள்: <i>maaNavarkaL:</i> Students:	Boy <i>Boy</i> Boy	Students answer, 'boy'.
3.	ஆசிரியர்: <i>aaciriyar:</i> Teacher:	Boy. சரி! Boy. <i>cari</i> Boy. Correct.	Teacher says it is correct.

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).

1.	ஆசிரியர்: <i>aaciriyar:</i> Teacher:	சரி உக்காருங்க. <i>cari ukkaarunka</i> ok. Sit down	SST has been used
2.	ஆசிரியர்: <i>aaciriyar:</i> Teacher:	சரி எல்லாரும் பள்ளிப் பையை தரலை வச்சாச்சா? ஓகே. இங்க கவனிக்கணும். <i>Cari. Ellaarum pallippaiyai taraila</i> <i>vaccaaccaa? Ok. inka kavanikka-</i> <i>Num.</i> Ok. Have you placed your school bag on the floor? OK. See here.	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.

1	மாணவி: <i>maaNavi:</i> Female student:	என் birthday வர மாதிரி இருக்கு <i>en birthday vara maatiri irukku</i> It looks like my birthday is coming	Student use SST and English word 'birthday'.
2	ஆசிரியை: Teacher:	உன்னோட birthday வர மாதிரி இருக்கா? ஆஹ். . . birthday என்ன சொல்லுவாங்க. <i>unnooTa birthday vara maatiri irukka? Aah. . birthday enna colvaanka</i> Your birthday is coming? AAH. How do you say birthday?	Teacher uses SST and repeats student's term, 'birthday' in English. At the same time, she asks the Tamil term for 'birthday'
3	மாணவர்கள்: <i>maaNavarkaL:</i> Students:	பிறந்த நாள். பிறந்தநாள். <i>piRantanaaL. . piRantanaaL</i> Birthday birthday	Students give Tamil translation for 'birthday'
4	ஆசிரியை	பிறந்தநாள் வரா	Teacher generally uses

		மாதிரி இருக்கு உனக்கு. சரி ஸ்வேதா <i>piRantanaaL varaa maatiri</i> <i>irukku unakku cari</i> Sweetha It looks like a birthday is coming to you. Correct, Sweetha.	SST
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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.

1.	ஆசிரியர்	நீங்க வந்து ஆஹ. . இல்ல. அந்த பேர்களையும், அந்த படங்களையும் வந்து ஒட்டப் போறீங்க. சரியா?..... ஒரு எழுத்த இந்த மாதிரி ஒட்ட வேண்டும். சரியா? எந்த குழு சரியா செய்றாங்க? முதல்ல செஞ்சி முடிக்கிறீங்க. அப்படின்னு நா பார்க்கப் போறேன். ஆனா ரொம்ப	Generally the teacher is using SST
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	<p><i>aaciriyar:</i></p> <p>Teacher:</p>	<p>முக்கியமா நீங்க என்ன மொழில பேசணும்.</p> <p><i>niinga vantu Aah illa. anta peerkaLaiyum, anta paTankalLaiyum vantu ottappooriinka. cariyaa?oru eRutta inta maatiri otta veenTum., cariyaa? enta kuRu cariyaa ceiRaanka? mutalla cenci muTikkiRaanka. appaTinnu naa paarkkapooReen. Aana rompa mukkiyamaa niinga enna moRila peecaNum.</i></p> <p>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?</p>	
2.	<p>மாணவர்கள்:</p> <p><i>maaNavarkaL:</i></p> <p>Students:</p>	<p>தமிழ்</p> <p><i>tamiR</i></p> <p>Tamil</p>	
3.	<p>ஆசிரியர்:</p> <p><i>aaciriyar:</i></p> <p>Teacher:</p>	<p>தமிழ்ல பேசணும். அப்புறம் சண்ட போடக்கூடாது. பார்க்கலாம்.</p> <p><i>tamiRla peecaNum. appuRam canTai pooTakkuTatu. paarkaalaam.</i></p> <p>Speak in Tamil. Then, don't fight. Let's see.</p>	

Excerpt 13

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

1.	மாணவர்: <i>maaNavar:</i> student:	நரி வந்து ஒரு மிருகம். அத வீடல் வளக்க முடியாது. <i>nari vantu oru mirukam. ata viitla vaLakka muTiyaatu.</i> Fox is an animal. We could not rear it at home.	Teacher and stu- dents speak in SST
2.	ஆசிரியர்: <i>aaciriyar:</i> Teacher:	ஏன் அத வீடல் வளக்க முடியாது? நரியும் அழகாதானே இருக்கு? <i>een ata viitla vaLakka muTiyaatu? nariyum aRakaataanee irukku?</i> Why couldn't we rear it at home? It also looks pretty.	
3.	மாணவர்: <i>maaNavar:</i> Student:	நரி அழகா இல்லை <i>Nari aRakaa illee</i> Fox is not pretty	
4.	ஆசிரியர்: <i>aaciriyar:</i> Teacher:	அழகா இல்லையா? <i>aRakaa illaiyaa?</i> Not pretty?	
5.	மாணவர்: <i>maaNavar:</i>	ஆனா நரி அழகாவே இருக்கு ஆனா அழகா இல்ல. ஏன்னா நரி வந்து கருப்பு நிறத்துல இருக்கு. எனக்கு கருப்பு நிறம்	

	Student:	புடிக்காது. <i>aanaa nari aRakaave irukku.</i> <i>aanaa aRakaa illa. eennaa nari</i> <i>vantu karuppu nittula irukku.</i> <i>enakku karuppu niram puTikkaatu.</i> But fox is pretty. But not pretty. Because fox is black. I don't like black.	
6.	ஆசிரியர்: <i>aaciriyar:</i> Teacher:	கருப்புற நிறத்துல இர்கறதால உனக்கு புடிக்காதா? சரி முக்கியமா ஏன் நரிய வீடல வளக்க முடியாது. <i>karuppu nirattula irkeRataala unakku</i> <i>piTikkaataa? cari. mukkiyamaa een</i> <i>nariya viitla vaLakka muTiyatu</i> You do not like it because it is in black. Ok, why we could not rear the fox at home?	
7.	மாணவர்: <i>maaNavar:</i> Student:	கடிக்கும். அதுக்கு வந்து ரொம்ப கூரான பல்லு <i>kaTikkum. atukku vantu romba</i> <i>kuuraana pallu</i> it will bite. it has very sharp teeth.	
8.	ஆசிரியர்: <i>aaciriyar:</i> Teacher:	கூரான பல்லு, சரி <i>kuuraana pallu. cari.</i> Sharp teeth. Ok.	
9.	மாணவர் <i>maaNavar</i> Student:	ரொம்ப பயமா இருக்கும் <i>romba payamaa irukkum</i> Very scary	

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.

<p>ஆசிரியர்1:</p> <p><i>aaciriyar 1:</i></p> <p>Teacher 1:</p>	<p>இப்போ பிள்ளைங்க நல்லா தமிழ் பேசறாங்க. வீட்டுல அப்பா அம்மா பேசனா இன்னும் நல்லாயிருக்கும். இப்போ இருக்கற பாடபுத்தகமும் நடவடிக்கைகளுமும் ஒதவியா இருக்கு</p> <p><i>ippoo piLLainka nalla tamiR peecRraanka. viittula appaa, ammaa peecunaa innum nallyirukkum. ippoo irukkaRa paadaputtakamu naTavaTikkainkaLu otaviyaa irukku</i></p> <p>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.</p>
<p>ஆசிரியர்2:</p> <p><i>aaciriyar 2:</i></p>	<p>நாமளும் மாணவர்களோட நல்லா ஆர்வமா பேசனா பிள்ளைகளும் சந்தோசமா பேசுவாங்க வகுப்பறை நல்லாருக்கும். தமிழ்ல பேச முடியாதவங்களுக்கு ஆங்கிலத்துல சொல்லித் தமிழ்ல கேப்பேன்</p>

Teacher 2:	<p>naamaLum maaNavarkaLooTa nallaa aarvamaa peecunaa piLLaikaLum canttoocama peecuvaanka. vakuppaaRai nallayirukkum. tamiRla peeca muTiyaaavankaLukku aankilattula collittamiRla keeppeen</p> <p>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.</p>
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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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