

Language Change and Maintenance of Tamil language in the Multilingual Context of Malaysia

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ABSTRACT: *The prevailing multilingual situation of Malaysia reflects the gradual shift in the use of minority languages (ethnic) like Tamil, both in formal as well as informal domains of language use. There are several reasons for language shift to take place in the maintenance of language, and one such is the existing power that goes with language(s). How far language attitudes, linguistic views and power based policies will poster the use of concerned language for the benefit of society at large is indeed a challenge and seems to be a question mark. The Malaysian Tamil society is gradually shifting to language like English and Bahasa Malaysia as media of instruction to achieve education needs in different displaces of knowledge, considering the modern economic- scientific and technological – occupational- developmental progress and needs of the society. Moreover, these kinds of existing rigidity in attitude towards language use and emotionally motivated views might cause problems in the long run for society in getting education or employment opportunities. Language policies has made mandatory use of Malay education, use of the English language at different levels with power and efficiency, use of mother- tongue languages in education and mass media as far as possible. The present day generation prefer training in job-oriented, application and practice oriented education, so they are forced to shift from their mother- tongue to the national language or English for specific purposes. This is because of the restricted use of their own languages. The present day use also reflects the shift from spoken Tamil to English as the home language of the Tamil community. So, this paper emphasizes the social relevance of the sociolinguistic research that is more concerned with d developing community, especially their language use. More so area the language policy activities in order to approach the problems faced by that community in formal domains of language.*

Keywords: *language shift, language maintenance, multilingualism , language policy, mother tongue*

I. INTRODUCTION

The Nation of Malaysia comprises two major areas, West (or Peninsular) Malaysia and East Malaysia. They are separated by the vast expanse of the South China Sea. West Malaysia is divided into eleven state namely Perlis, Kedah, Penang, Perak, Pahang, Kelantan, Terengganu, Selangor, Negeri Sembilan, Malacca and Johor.. In addition, There are the three Federal territories of Persekutuan, Putrajaya and Labuan, the first of which is the Federal District where the capital of Malaysia , Kuala Lumpur, is located. East Malaysia, in turn, comprises only two state, Sabah and Sarawak that extend along the northern coast of Borneo and cover approximately one-fourth of the island. The total population of Malaysia is approximately 29 million according to the census data of the National Population and Family Development Board (2010). The county is a multiracial kingdom where the monarch is selected from among the sultans presiding in each state and rotated for a period of years. It accommodates a large number of ethnic groups among which the most numerous ones are the Malays as well as other indigenous people (bumiputra), the Chinese and the Indians. The approximate break down of these ethnicities is as follow: Malays and other bumiputras (Or native of the Malaysian soil), 62%; Chinese, 27% Indians 8% and others 3%.

II. MULTILINGUAL SET UP OF MALAYSIA

Malaysia is a multilingual country where at least 4 main languages namely Malay, English, Chinese and Tamil are used in formal and informal domains of language use. However there are other native and non – native, but all minority languages. English is recognized as a second language and given a significant place, especially in the formal level activities.

Existing Multilingual Practice

Administration	:	Bahasa Malaysia
Education	:	Bahasa Malaysia (major role) English (important role) & considerable importance
	:	Chinese – Tamil (minimum role as ethnic languages)
Others	:	(as medium of instruction, language teaching – learning...)

(Mass) Media	:	Bahasa Malaysia English Chinese – Tamil
Print		- Radio – Television & others

Practice and Role of Minority Ethnic language (other than above)

1. Native Malaysian languages like Iban, kadazan, Dusun etc
2. Languages of Indian origin – Telugu, Malayalam, Punjabi etc

III. MALAYSIAN'S EDUCATION SYSTEM AFTER INDEPENDENCE (AFTER 1957)

In the era of independence in Malaya education policies were formed to unite the education system towards multi culture and multilingual. One of them is The Report of Education Committee of 1956., better known as the Razak Report, which laid down the goals, direction and basic thrusts of the national education policy (Asia Abu Samad 1994). The report laid down clearly its objectives and strategy towards nation-building. It was also a guide to our language planner to mould the education policy. According to Asmah Haji Omar (1982), the Razak Report highlighted its concern of the use of various languages spoken in Malaya especially English, Malay, Tamil and Chinese. It also paved the way to use the Malay language as a national language in all schools. This was later gazetted as Language Act 1961.

The Language Act 1961, paved way for Malay language to be introduced, as a medium of instruction in primary and secondary (higher) schools and English was taught as a second language in all the primary and secondary school. The Chinese and Tamil primary continued teaching in their respective mother tongue but introduced Malay language as a national language and English as the second language. English was also retained as the medium of instruction in the former English school until 1970 when the medium was gradually converted to Malay language in stages. Conversion period from English to Malay language took place in stages.

In 1968, Physical and Health Education, Music, Art and Craft, and Local studies being the first to convert (grades 1-3). In 1969, Civics (starting from grade 4) began to be taught in the national language, followed by history and geography (also from grade 4) in 1970. In 1970 too, the remaining subjects not yet taught in the national language – Science and Mathematics, began to be converted to the national language progressed stage, so that by 1975 all the subjects at all levels of primary education in these schools were taught in national language (Asiah Abu Samah 1994, p.55).

In 1975, the conversion period were completed. All the subjects were taught in the national language except for Chinese and Tamil Schools. The schools continued teaching all the subjects in their respective mother tongue except languages for Malay and English languages which was a compulsory subjects in this school. This scenario changes when all the primary school students were given secondary education under one roof. All the subjects in Form 1 (grade 1) were taught in the national language.

By the end of 1980 the conversions from English to Malay medium in the secondary school were completed, From 1981 the sixth form classes began their conversion to the national language. In 1983 all courses in the local universities were progressively converted to the national language. All the primary, secondary school and higher education centres in Malaysia used Malay language as medium of instruction until 2003.

IV. TAMIL LANGUAGE USE AND MAINTENANCE AMONG TAMILS IN MALAYSIA

4.1 Language Policy

The change in language policy (Razak Report 1956) was able to maintain the use of Tamil language in Tamil primary schools. Therefore, Tamil language was safe guarded through this policy. So to this date, all the 524 Tamil primary schools in Malaysia are teaching all the subjects in Tamil language except for Malay, the national language and English, the second language. This scenario shows that teaching and learning in formal situation is still maintained.

4.2 Tamil Language in Secondary Schools and Tertiary Level

In secondary schools Tamil language is taught as mother-tongue subject (POL). The Tamil language as a subject is taught and students are prepared for public examinations in schools, for example, Lower Secondary Examination, School Examination Certificate (O Level) and Higher School Examination (A Level). Tamil is also taught as a course for training the Tamil teachers at Teachers' College. In the universities Tamil is taught as a program for Tamil teachers. There are also Tamil courses as Major and Minor which emphasizes language, literature and linguistics. Tamil language is also taught as a proficiency courses.

4.3 Tamil in Media

In the Malaysia setting various media such as television, radio and the press have contributed significantly for the growth of Tamil (Paramasivam, 2010). The Malaysian radio programming included 24hours of Tamil broadcasting in its Indian language channel where

Tamil occupied 95% of its broadcasting. Apart from songs and music considerably time is allocated to talk shows, poems recitals and plays or dramas. Apparently, locally printed magazines and dailies as well as magazines from Tamilnadu (India) are all available in Malaysia. This creates an ample of opportunities for Malaysian Tamils to read and develop Tamil language skills and vocabulary.

Another effective media which contributes greatly to the growth of Tamil is the Internet. All major Tamil dailies can be found on websites and these contain a wide range of Tamil news. This creates another stage for Tamil language to be maintained and used by younger generation.

4.4 Tamil Associations

Tamil Associations all over Malaysia offer multiple activities with the objective of developing Tamil language skills and reinforce Tamil culture concepts. One of its primary activities of these associations is to support for the publication of Tamil books dealing with different aspects of Tamil language and culture. The presence and maintenance of Tamil language is also prevalent in Tamil political party, for example, Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC), where this party is focused on Indian welfare, where Tamil language is used as the main medium of interaction.

All these situations and scenarios show that Tamil language is used and maintained among the Tamil speakers in Malaysia although they are in the multilingual society. Although, Tamil is used and maintained, but the language as a minority language faces challenges.

V. TAMIL LANGUAGE SHIFT

One of the main challenges of minority languages is language shift. If a minority language cannot be maintained, there are several outcomes. For example, language death, speakers become bilingual and young speakers become dominant in another language (Schiffman, 2007). In Malaysia if Tamils shift languages there are two possible outcomes. One is that they become Malay speakers and the other is to become English speakers (Schiffman, 2007). According to Paramasivam (2010), there is another possible outcome, mixed speakers, whereby the Tamils speak Tamil and English or Tamil and Malay. These speakers codeswitch from one language to another by using Tamil with another language. This happens because they live in a multilingual society who speaks in a variety of languages.

In an article written by Marimuttu in Sandu and Mani (1993) volume, he has made a claim that the educational system provided to the plantation workers at estate, the community only used Tamil solely as a medium of communication. But in the era of globalization, Malaysia has moved from agricultural to industrial sector. As a result, plantation workers and their children have migrated from estates to several parts of the cities seeking for economic needs. A different scenario has existed for these Tamil plantation workers who have only used Tamil as a medium of interaction but now in the new demanding and challenging setting, they need to mix with other language speakers. Hence, the need to converse in Tamil has been reduced or not needed at all. Apparently, there are some Tamil plantation workers who have excelled and become well educated. They are now in higher economic status due to their educational background. This group of Tamils who are well educated are becoming English speakers. As a result, they have become a threat for the maintenance of Tamil language in Malaysia.

Another challenge for the Tamil language maintenance is that Tamil is not used widely by other language speakers compared to English or Mandarin language. Tamil language is only preserved and used for the cultural, religion, ceremonies or entertainments by the Tamil speakers only.

The present prevailing situation in Malaysia is that the Tamil language is only practiced by the Tamils and their children emotionally (Paramasivam, 2010). Tamil is protected by these speakers by safeguarding the language and repeatedly reminding them to preserve the language or the language may die. They are also constantly reminded that Tamil is 'our mother-tongue' and its must be practiced so that the next generation will continue speaking it.

VI. CONCLUSION

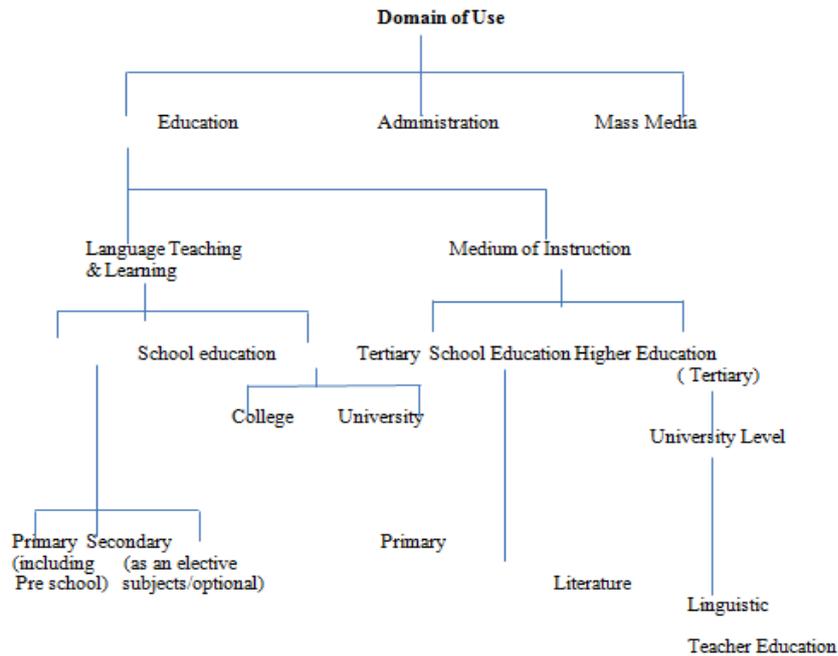
In conclusion, Tamil was used full-fledged in estates among the plantation workers not only as for communication but also for religion and cultural purposes. But due to the development in Malaysia, as a developing country, more and more Tamils are speaking less in Tamil specially the educated Tamils as it is not a demanding language for economic purpose. Tamil is still used culturally and it is protected emotionally by the speakers.

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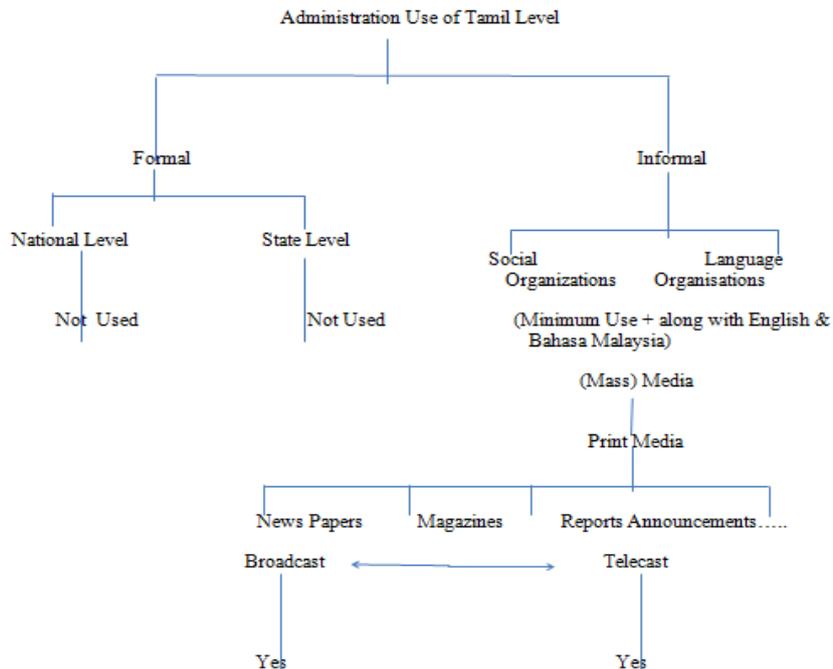
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Appendix 1

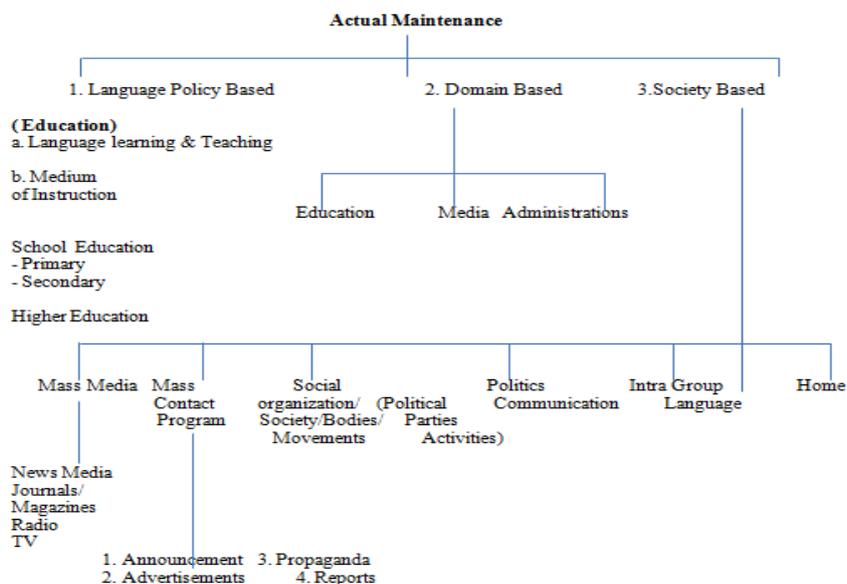
Tamil Language and Its Use (Maintenance) Maintenance of Tamil in Malaysia



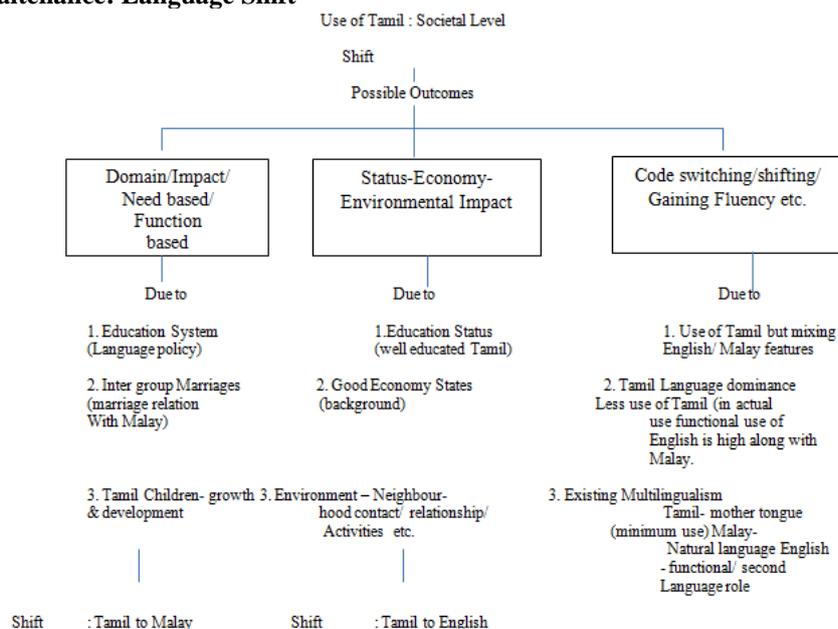
Appendix 2



Appendix 3



Appendix 4
Language Maintenance: Language Shift



Appendix 5

Maintaining Tamil (as a home Language)	Maintaining Tamil as language of Education	Maintaining Tamil as in Media Language	Maintaining Tamil in Socio-cultural activities etc
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Among the Education (highly) 2. Among youngsters 3. Among older generation etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. School (pre-school including) education 2. Medium of Instruction 3. Teaching/Practice for the use of spoken Tamil/day –to-day living language 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. News Media 2. Socio-cultural activities/programs 3. Magazines + Journals 4. Communication of Tamil (For report making, announcements, Advertisements etc. + Political/comical contact etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Performing Activities 2. Interacting 3. Intra – Group activity 4. Contacts

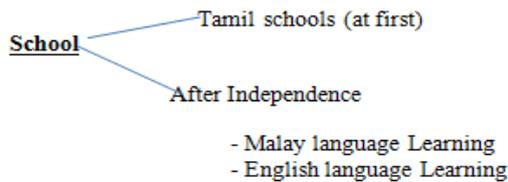
**Appendix 6
Findings and Discussion**

1. Plantation Life (early migration) - Living in estate (areas)

Language Use : Tamil, especially, spoken (informal)
 Plantation school, movies watching, reading literary books, using different media (especially from Tamilnadu, Sri Lanka...)

Malay : Minimum use only

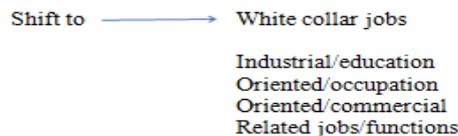
2. **Gradual shift** - (getting education)



**Appendix 7
Learning Through**



3. **Industrization /Semi Urbanization : From Plantation Work**



Language Use : Tamil (considerable)
 But Shift to Malay } (Maximum)
 English }

Appendix 8

4. **Modernization (Modern Period)**

