CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.0   Introduction

Malaysia is a multi-racial country with a variety of cultures, languages, and religions. The Malays form the largest group in Malaysia followed by the Chinese. The Indians are the third largest group of the total population in Malaysia (Daniel, 1992: 61).

The Indians came to Malaysia as immigrants (Andronov, 1963 and Grimes, 1984, cited in Francis, 1986: 60). As in other places in the world such as in Fiji, Mauritius, Trinidad, South Africa, Singapore, Vietnam, and Central and South America, they have adapted to their local environment, such as in political and social institutions.

According to Daniel (1992: 67) the term "Indian" is a general term and it includes various ethnic groups such as Indian Tamils, Malayalees, Telegus, Sikhs, Pakistanis, Bangladeshis, and Sri Lankan (Ceylonese) Tamils. The Tamil ethnic group comprises more than 85% of the total sub-ethnic groups of Indians in Malaysia (Daniel, 1992: ibid). The Tamils themselves practise different religions such as Hinduism, Christianity, and Islam. Moreover, the Tamils can also be divided into different castes or "jati" such as Ahamudiyar, Ambattar, Chettiar, Pallar, Mudaliyar, Vellalar, and others (Rajakrishnan, 1984: 95).

The multiracial environment and the effects of urbanisation and modernisation have brought much social, political, and linguistic changes to the Malaysian Tamils. The Malaysian Tamils selected for this study can speak at least three languages: Bahasa Melayu, Tamil, and English.

1.1   Background of the Study

The majority of the Tamils in Malaysia are able to communicate with the other races by using English or Bahasa Melayu in their workplace, and in other domains of interaction.

Most of the early Tamil immigrants who settled in Malaya worked in estates and used the Tamil Language to communicate with their fellow settlers. With education, many of the younger generation of the Tamils are now working in other economic areas such as in the industrial sectors, in businesses such as in the insurance, textile, and other forms of small-scale businesses. Many are also in professional fields such as in medicine, education, and law.

Many of the younger generation of Malaysian Tamils are bilinguals. In fact, many of them are trilingual for they can speak Tamil, Bahasa Melayu, and English. This is largely due to the educational setting in Malaysia that allows the teaching and learning of vernacular languages such as Tamil and Mandarin (Edwards, 1994: 184). In addition, being bilingual and multilingual has allowed them to adapt to their local environment. As far as English is concerned, a Malaysian Tamil who has at least primary school education would have been taught some basic English. Thus, many of the educated Tamils are able to communicate in English with other Tamils, Malays, and Chinese, and other Malaysians.

The linguistic diversity of Malaysian Tamils is made even richer with the existence of the different religions and cultures in Malaysia. Thus, due to the diverse linguistic and cultural scenario, many Malaysian Tamils practise linguistic aspects like code switching, borrowing, translation, and other means of expressions, drawing from all the languages that they use in their daily communication. In fact, most of

the time, Malaysians practise these linguistic features spontaneously, without pre-planning in their daily communication.

Like most other Malaysians, the Malaysian Tamils also tend to mix languages in their daily communication with their friends. For instance, a Malaysian Tamil may speak differently to different people as shown:

Example 1: To a Malay Friend.

- *"Aiya, why are you so **lambat** (late)? I **tunggu** (waited) you for so long!*

Example 2: To a Tamil Friend.

- ***"Dei Maccan** (Brother-in-law, here used as a nick-name), why are you so late? I **tunggu** (waited) you for so long.*

Note:

- **BOLD** = Tamil words,
- *ITALICS* = Bahasa Melayu words.

(The examples shown are the researcher's own examples.)

This shows that a Malaysian Tamil can speak differently to different people according to, amongst other things, the nature of their relationship, level of intimacy, and intended meanings. The speech behaviour of the Malaysian Tamils, especially the educated ones, indicate the usage of English, Bahasa Melayu, Chinese, and Tamil lexical items in their daily communication (Asmah, 1987: 15).

Researchers like Jakobson (1960) and Hymes (1962), (cited in Pride and Holmes, 1979: 35), found that factors such as participants, topic, setting or context, channel, message form, mood or tone, intentions and effects, influence the speech behaviour of people. Other researchers, such as Trudgill (1995: 84), also explain that

the use of languages can vary according to the social class of the respective speakers, ethnic group, age, sex, and context in which the language is spoken. Jakobson's and Hymes' view could be applied to the language behaviour of the Malaysian Tamils who speak English in the domain of friendship.

In fact, the way Malaysian Tamils, like many other ethnic groups, mix and switch from one language to another is an art by itself. An average Malaysian Tamil switches from one language into another with ease, and most of the time, it is done subconsciously.

1.2   Statement of the Problem

Many educated Malaysian Tamils, tend to use English, Tamil, and Bahasa Melayu to communication with their friends. They may also tend to use Sanskrit, Hindi, and Chinese lexical items during their English conversation with their friends. The researcher noted that Malaysian Tamils use a considerable number of Tamil lexical items in their English conversations, particularly in the domain of friendship..

The researcher also noted from observations that Malaysian Tamils of all age groups use Tamil lexical items in their English conversations. The examples shown are gathered from actual observations.

Example 1: A Group of Teenagers at a Bus Stop.

A: **Dei** (Hey) the bus coming ah?

B: No lah.

A: **Maccan** (Brother-in-law, here used as a nickname), **paru da** ((look, at him)!

C: <u>Sengkoi</u> (Stupid) lah you. Come, let's <u>chow</u> (go).

Example 2: Two young ladies at a supermarket.

A: I don't think I will go for it.

B: **Ama** (Yes) <u>lah.</u>

A: **Romba Kashtham.** (It is very difficult.) I will wait.

Example 3: Two elderly gentlemen at a seminar.

A: It all comes to that. Young or old alike.

B: Yeah – alike.

A: **Karma.** (Hinduism law of cause and effect.)

B: ((LAUGHTER)) **Ellame karma tha-n.** (Everything is **"karma".**)

Note:

- **BOLD** = Tamil words,

- *ITALICS* = Bahasa Melayu words,

- <u>UNDERLINED</u> = Chinese words,

- <u>**BOLD UNDERLINED**</u> = Sanskrit words.

(The examples shown are the researcher's own examples.)

The researcher in the course of teaching English to Tamil school students and later to Tamil-educated secondary school students noticed a pattern in the English that the students spoke. The Tamil students spoke differently to different people according to the domains in which they were using Tamil. The students also used Tamil as well as lexical items from other languages, in the English that they spoke.

Thus, the researcher feels that it is important to determine the extent to which Tamil influences the English spoken by Malaysian Tamils in the domain of friendship. The researcher also feels that the domain of friendship is one area of

language interaction where the linguistic behaviour of English-speaking Malaysian Tamils could be studied at close range. In this way, some light will be shed as to how Malaysian Tamils attempt to change their social behaviour to fit into the linguistic situation in the domain of friendship. It is expected that the mother tongue as well as the various languages used in Malaysia will influence the linguistic repertoire of the English-speaking Malaysian Tamils in the domain of friendship.

1.3   The Objectives

In order to explore the English spoken by Malaysian Tamils in the domain of friendship, certain definite objectives have been formulated. These objectives are to:

1.   locate the Tamil lexical items used in the English conversations of Malaysian Tamils in the domain of friendship;

2.   determine the categories of Tamil lexical items used in the English conversations of Malaysian Tamils in the domain of friendship; and

3.   assess the influence of the Tamil lexical items used in the English conversations of the participants of the study.

1.4   The Scope of the Study

The researcher has limited the area of the study to the English spoken by Malaysian Tamils in the domain of friendship. However, Malaysian Tamils also speak English in many other domains such as in the family, employment, and other domains. Thus, by limiting the scope of the study to the domain of friendship, the researcher is able to collect valid and accurate data.

No attempt is made to identify and analyse the Tamil lexical items used in the English conversations outside the domain of friendship. The main emphasis is on

the Tamil lexical items used in the English conversations of Malaysian Tamils in the domain of friendship. As for the participants of the study, both males and females are included. A total of 84 participants were selected from different age groups, education, and socio-economic levels. The age groups of the participants are as shown:

i) 10-20 Years.

ii) 21-49 Years.

iii) 50 ≥ Years.

The rationale behind the wide selection of participants from different socio-economic levels is due to the fact that human face-to-face interaction might be convention based or rule-governed (Duncan, 1997: 149). Thus, a wide range of age group was selected in order to get a broader perspective of the language use of the participants, and to delve deeper into the conventions and rules of language use of Malaysian Tamil friends in the domain of friendship. Further, by selecting participants from all walks of life the researcher is able to gather more accurate and valid data. These data will be used to help the researcher in answering the research questions of the study.

1.5   Purpose of the Study

Researchers like Fishman, Kachru, and Greenberg acknowledge the fact that a bilingual person's mother tongue will influence his use of a second language. This is indicated by the presence of code switching, borrowing, and other linguistic phenomena in the language spoken by a bilingual. In the case of this study, Tamil seems to influence the spoken English of the Tamils in Malaysia.

The main purpose of the study therefore, is to identify the Tamil lexical items used in the English conversations of Malaysian Tamils in the domain of friendship. The Tamil lexical items found in the English conversations of the participants will be used to substantiate the argument that a bilingual person's mother tongue will influence his second language speaking.

Since language is "fundamentally an instrument of communication" (Ducrol and Oswald, 1979: 15), the study aims to find out why English-speaking Malaysian Tamil bilinguals code switch and code mix in their English conversation with their friends.

The domain of friendship is chosen as the research area in this study. This is because the conversations that occur in the domain of friendship are usually set in relaxed and informal contexts. The relaxed atmosphere of the conversations allows genuine, and spontaneous communication. In this way, the study will be able to explain in detail, and analyse the influence and meanings behind the Tamil lexical items used in the participants conversations. Thus, the analysis of the conversations will also give an understanding to the claim that "language is not simply a means of communication, but the expression of the mind and world-view of those who use it" (Von Humboldt, cited in Ducrol and Oswold, 1979: 339).

The study is also expected to create an awareness that the Tamil and other languages used in the spoken English of Malaysian Tamils in the domain of friendship need not be viewed as errors, but as a kind of linguistic accommodation to linguistically "survive" in a multi-racial country like Malaysia.

1.6   Definition of Terms

The researcher has attempted to give the definition of some of the terms used in the study for reference and clarification:

1.6.1   Lexical Items

According to Crystal (1997: 221) a unit of vocabulary is generally referred to as a "lexical item" or a "lexeme". Richards and Platts (1993: 210) further describe a lexical item as the smallest unit in the meaning system of a language. According to them, a lexical items is an abstract unit that may occur in many different forms in actual spoken or written sentences and is regarded as the same lexeme even when inflected. For example, "give", "gives", "given", and "gave" all belong to the one lexeme "give" (ibid: 210)

Similarly Trask (1993: 158) explains that a lexical item is regarded as an abstract unit that has constant meaning. A lexical item can vary in form for grammatical purposes. Thus, according to Trask, "a lexical item is a word, in the sense in which a dictionary contains words, or in which a dictionary of English contains so many words". Trask also cites that in most but not all theories, a single lexical item receives a single entry form in a dictionary.

Palmer (1981: 32) gives a more comprehensive discussion of what a lexical item is. According to Palmer, the technical term for "word" is "lexeme" and the plural of "lexeme" is "lexical items". Palmer (ibid) states that words (or lexical items) can be divided into two categories, that is "full words" and "form words". "Full words" are words like "tree", "bird", and "sing", and "form words" are words like "at", "in", and "of". The "form words", according to Palmer belong to the grammar and have only "grammatical" meaning. Such meaning cannot be stated in

isolation, but only in relation to other words and even sometimes to the whole sentence.

1.6.1.1 Multi-word Units

Mey (1998: 504) explains that mulit-word or compound words such as "cake baker" are considered as single lexical items that carry a single meaning. Other compound words such as "blackbirds", "shoeblack", and "greenfinch" are also considered as single lexical items. The study has also taken Tamil multi-word units such as **"pallakottae"** (jackfruit seeds), as single lexical items.

1.6.1.2 Collocations

Some words may have more specific meanings in particular collocations. For example, Warner (1984: 15) feels that certain institutionalized lexical relation must take into account the syntagmatic and semantic aspect of a particular collocation. In this way, we will be able to make sense of the meaning of the entire collocation. Some of the examples cited by Warner are "play fair", "deep regret", "flock of sheep", "apologize humbly", "deep love", "beguiling smile", and "(to) complain bitterly". For the purpose of this study, common Tamil collocations are considered as single units of meaning. For example, **"sariyana pasi"** (terrible hunger), **"enge poringe"** (where are you going) are common Tamil collocations found in the study.

1.6.1.3 Idioms

Warner (1984: 14) states that the semantics of an idiom is totally opaque. This is because the meaning of an idiom cannot be automatically obtained from the meaning of the consistuent lexemes. For example, Richards and Platts (1993: 210)

define expressions like "bury the hatchet" as one unit of meaning, and is considered as a word because it carries a single meaning.

However, Palmer (1981: 36) explains that "while semantically idioms are single units, but they are not single grammatical units like words". In line with Warner and Palmer, Tamil idioms such as **"Panam iruntha tha-n pathu-m pesum"** (Money can do anything) found in the study are treated as single lexical items.

1.6.2 Lexical Gaps

According to Crystal (1997: 221) the absence at a specific structural place in a language's lexical field is called a "lexical gap". Crystal cites examples such as "brother v. sister", and "son v. daughter" in English. However, according to David, there are no separate lexemes for some terms like "male" v. "female" cousin in English. Because of this, language users may have to use lexical items from another language to substitute this lexical gap in English.

1.6.3 Spoken English

Spoken English refers to the various varieties and levels of English spoken by the participants of this study. The spoken English in Malaysia varies greatly from the written form. The standard written form of English is used in all formal occasions such as in the teaching and learning of English in schools, and in the English News in the radio and television. However, in the informal spoken form of English of many Malaysian Tamils, particularly when it is being used in the domain of friendship, English is usually incorporated with lexical items from other languages. This is because colloquial Malaysian English is influenced by the

Malaysian English variety that is spoken widely by Malaysians, particularly in informal situations (Lee, 1996: 9).

1.6.4 Domain of Friendship

A "domain" refers to an area of human activity in which one particular speech variety or a combination of several speech varieties is regularly used (Fishman 1970: 154). Thus, a domain is actually an "institutionalized sphere" in which language behaviour occur (ibid: 154). In the case of this research, the "institutionalized sphere" under study is the domain of friendship of Malaysian Tamils who speak English. A domain is usually a group related speech situation. If a number of friends get together and start talking, they are said to belong to the domain of friendship.

1.6.5 Borrowing

Gumperz (1977: 35) explains that "borrowing" consists of "the introduction of single words or short, frozen, idiomatic phrases from one language into the other". The items in question are incorporated into the grammatical system of the borrowed language. Richards and Platt states that borrowing is said to have taken place when a word or a phrase is taken out from one language and is used in another language (1993: 40).

However, if a borrowed word is used widely, most speakers pronounce it according to the systems of their own language. For example, Malaysian Tamils usually use the Bahasa Melayu word "botak" (bald) when referring to a bald man during their English conversations. However, if a borrowed word is used widely, most speakers pronounce it according to the systems of their own language. The

Malaysian Tamils in this study pronounced "botak" as [bɒtɑː]. This is because consonant sounds are rarely found in the final positions in colloquial Tamil. Thus, in the case of "botak", the consonant /k/ is omitted, following the Tamil rule, and is pronounced as [bɒtɑː] (Andronov, 1969: 37).

1.6.6 Code Switching

Code switching refers to the change from one language or language variety to another (Richards and Platt, 1993: 58). According to Gumperz (1977: 5), code switching does not necessarily indicate the imperfect knowledge of the grammatical systems in question. He states that in many cases the code-switched information could be equally well expressed in any of the languages that the speakers use. However, Gumperz states that the linguistic alternants that are selected by the speakers is automatic, and usually the speakers do not consciously recall using the linguistic alternants in their speech (Gumperz, 1977: 3).

The Tamils in Malaysia live in an ethnically and culturally diverse country. They spend much of their day interacting with other races such as the Malays, and Chinese who are of different linguistic backgrounds. In order to be effective at work and in business, and in other areas of formal interaction, many Malaysian Tamils have to use Bahasa Melayu, which is the National Language in Malaysia. However, at the same time they also participate in the friendship or in the family domains, which have separate values, beliefs, communicative language, norms and conventions. Thus, they are "forced" to use different levels and forms of languages in order to be effective in their communication. For example, Malaysian Tamils use the spoken English (Malaysian English) and other forms of linguistic features in their communication with friends, and in other informal situations. This pattern of

communication has also given rise to code switching among many of the Malaysian Tamils who speak English in the domain of friendship.

1.6.7 Code Mixing

Richards and Platt (1993: 57) defines "code mixing" as a mixing of two languages or codes. According to them, code mixing usually occur in a sentence without a change of topic. Code mixing is very common in bilingual or multilingual communities and it is usually a mark of solidarity. For example, code mixing can happen in the informal speech of bilingual friends or colleagues. Richards and Platt (1993: ibid) also explains that code mixing can involve various levels of language. For example, code mixing can occur at the phonological level, morphological level, or in the grammatical structures, or in the lexical items in a sentence. This study has taken code switching and code mixing, as a common linguistic element of the Malaysian Tamils who speak English, and as thus is treated as a similar linguistic phenomenon.

1.7 Significance of the Study

The study is hoped to give an insight into the communicative pattern and the linguistic behaviour of Malaysian Tamils who speak English in the domain of friendship. It is hoped that the findings of the study will be of benefit to future researchers who wish to conduct their research on the linguistic adaptation of Malaysian Tamils. This study is also hoped to bridge the lack of the number of researches on the issue of code mixing and code switching among Malaysian Tamils who speak English in the domain of friendship.

1.8   Conclusion

This Chapter has discussed the background, and the statement of the problem of the study, the objectives and scope, and the definition of the terms used in the study. Chapter II will provide a critical review of the related literature pertaining to the study.