

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.0 General Introduction

This study is about ‘language structure’ and ‘language use of pronouns in the Malaysian Spoken Tamil (MST)’. In language structure there are linguistic features starting from speech sounds to sentences which occur in a formalized way. So, the description of language consists of phonetic features, phonological structure, morphological structure, syntactic structure and discourse structure. All these features and structures are related to one another and occur in the language in an orderly and systematic way (Hockett, 1958).

There are well structured relationships called grammatical relationships found among them. Each language has its own parts of speech but we find universality in the use of such speech forms like nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, particles, etc. Nouns and verbs are the two major categories and all others are dependent grammatical categories or parts of speech. In the noun structure of a language we find different groups of nouns, pronouns and their subcategories used in forming phrases and sentences.

Noun functions as the subject of a sentence and can occur in the predicate as well. There are different types of nouns like human vs. non human nouns, count vs. mass nouns, abstract nouns, animate vs. inanimate nouns, kinship nouns, place and time denoting nouns, quality vs. quantity nouns and numerals and so on. All these nouns have grammatical functions and specific contexts when they occur not only as independent forms but also in

phrases and sentences. The use of a particular noun becomes significant and explicit when it finds place in larger constructions like sentence and discourse.

That's the reason why we study not only the structure of parts of speech (components of grammar) but also the use of different parts of speech in the description of a language. In the formation of phrases, sentences, etc pronoun is one of the subgroups of nouns used in languages, and it has both structural and functional importance in any language. Pronoun occurs as the subject of a sentence and also occurs with case suffixes or prepositions in the predicate of a sentence. So there are different structures (morphological or syntactic) in which pronouns occur and they perform different linguistic and social functions as well. Though pronoun seems to be a simple grammatical category and subcategory at the surface level, the use of pronouns is really not that simple. This is because of the grammatical relationships found with the preceding or following grammatical forms that occur in phrases or sentences. So, there is a need to study the complexity found in the structure and use of pronouns in a language. In languages like Tamil pronouns (its alternants) occur with the verbs also [as we find pronouns occurring in finite verb forms]. Indeed the terminal suffix of a finite verb in Tamil is a pronoun marker.

Spoken Tamil refers to many varieties of Tamil spoken by the Tamils in Malaysia as well as in other Tamil speaking countries like India, Sri Lanka and others. In Tamil the spoken variety is found to be different from the written one and this is because spoken is informal and used almost in all informal day to day social interactions. (Spoken one is informal because since Malaysia is a multilingual country the speakers tend to mix here and there all kinds of forms).

Modern Tamil represents the Tamil that is used in the modern period both in the formal and informal domains of use. It is a variety of Tamil that is used in formal domains of use like literature, education, administration, etc. Modern Tamil is the language used for carrying out all the functions of the society- both formal and informal? Does it include the two distinct varieties? When we try to answer questions of this type, a variety of views are obtained. But the reasonable and convincing description includes the following:

1. The Tamil that is used for formal and informal use
2. The two varieties of Tamil in use – written and spoken at present
3. The modernized (and standardized) variety of Tamil meant for formal use

So, Modern Tamil serves as a cover term to represent both the varieties of Tamil namely spoken and written (literary). Modern Tamil is the one most commonly used in the present day language use especially in the domains of education, administration, and mass media (except the movie medium). Modern Spoken Tamil variety, on the other hand shows dialect differences at the regional and social levels (Shanmugam Pillai 1960,65, Zvelebil,1963, Karunakaran 1971 & 1981, Pattanayak et al 1977). Modern Written Tamil makes use of various kinds of modernized and standardized coinages, translations, and nativized forms including adoptions from other languages at different levels of language structure. This type of variety helps to achieve efficiency and easy adoptability in language use. That is, in other words, the expected communicative competence in language use.

There are excellent traditional grammars and treatises in Tamil written during the ancient and medieval periods. One could also find descriptive, historical and comparative grammars and studies of various texts and dialect grammars and descriptions, produced applying different linguistic theoretical models and frameworks. There are also grammars

and structural outlines of different types for Modern Tamil- spoken and written. However, there is no study available that presents the description of spoken Tamil from the points of view of ‘common core’ on the one hand, and ‘dialectal variations’ on the other. This study hence tries to fill the gap, as it presents the grammatical (structural) description for the pronouns to start within the Malaysian Spoken Tamil.

1.1 Background of the Study

Malaysia is multilingual country where we find the use of two or more languages both in the formal and informal use. Therefore switching and mixing of linguistic features is a common phenomenon from one language to the other. In Malaysia English is the second most important language whereby most of them can speak two to three languages including their mother tongues. The immigrants living the nineteenth century brought in few languages into Malaysia. As a result, Malaysians have the ability to use more than one language and able to switch between languages due to the prevailing multilingual context.

The Tamils in Malaysia are generally multilingual especially the younger generation. This statement is based on the observation of the general population. We tend to mix the languages when we communicate with our peers, family and colleagues. During those days education in Tamil was mainly associated with the rubber plantations because many Indians were employed there. A number of Tamil schools were started in the Rubber plantations for the benefit of the Tamil community. (Arasaratnam, S, 1970)

Choosing the right and correct pronouns plays an important role in communication. It is a fundamental element because pronoun is a word that takes the place of a noun. Pronouns can be in one of three cases: subject, object or possessive. A pronoun usually refers to

something/somebody already mentioned in a phrase, sentence or in a text. When we address a person we must choose our words carefully to show the social relation between or among the participants. Each linguistic community has its own sets of verbal behavior specified for each context and situation. In certain contexts or situations a speaker is not free to choose any of the alternatives available in the language. He or she is constrained to use what is most appropriate for the context or situation concerned. While talking with others we have to use different styles. That is, what we want to say, how we want to say and how to select appropriate sentences types, words and sounds, and are all governed by different set of rules. Choice of pronouns and related syntactic and morphological nuances are set apart in many languages, more so in the tradition-bound societies of India. There are usages with particular reference to address terms, vocative expressions, kinship terms, politeness expressions and so on. Generally spoken Tamil differs from that of the written Tamil because Tamil is a diglossic language. Written form is taught in schools in the formal learning domain. Spoken one is used in daily conversations with others. In almost all the informal contexts including some of the channels of mass media (like cinema, radio and etc). Nowadays we do offer Tamil language courses as a major study for undergraduate students in local universities. Tamil is commonly used by Indians in Malaysia in their daily communication. But the younger ones (those belonging to the younger generation) tend to code switch and mix with English and Malay words because of the multilingual contact and most of them nowadays are being sent to Non Tamil medium schools.

Besides, local radio services do emphasize on the importance and use of the Tamil language. The local broadcasting television and radio channels do organize chats, news, discussions and interviews hosted by Indians who are well versed in Tamil. When we study languages like Tamil by applying the linguistic methodology we have to study the

use of pronouns also as pronouns are frequently used in formal and informal linguistic contexts and social situations. Not much research has been done with the reference to the Malaysian Spoken Tamil. There is a need to undertake systematic research concerning the noun and verb structures of spoken Tamil (the communicative language). Therefore the researcher had initiated and accomplished this short term research.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Malaysian Tamil has its own characteristics features especially in the spoken variety. The natural intonation pattern of Malaysian Spoken Tamil explicitly brings out this fact and one can easily identify a Malaysian Tamil speaker from a Tamil speaker of Tamilnadu (India) by closely observing his or her pronunciation, pausing, natural intonation pattern, etc. There are several lexical, morphological and to a certain extent syntactic variations found in the Malaysian Spoken Tamil when compared to other spoken varieties used elsewhere. As there is no full fledged linguistic or sociolinguistic description available on MST there is a need to have a well formalized structural and sociolinguistic description that would be useful for educational, administrative and mass media domains and functions.

Pronouns form an important area in the structure of language as well as use of language for different purposes. As this is a short term research project undertaken by a single researcher it is not possible to make a complete description of noun structure and verb structure of the language concerned. And so the researcher has restricted this study to pronouns to start with as the aim of this research is to identify the pronouns and condition the occurrences

both in structure and use, as far as possible. The researcher has chosen two types of research methods to accomplish this research.

This motivated the researcher to undertake this kind of study not only to find out how the pronouns categorized and subcategorized but also to identify the use of pronouns used in the society with specific reference to socio cultural context. This picture has brought the researcher's interest to analyze the spoken structure and use of pronouns in Malaysian spoken Tamil.

1.3 Objectives of the study

This study has two main objectives: i) to identify the different types of pronouns in all the three persons with variant forms (morphological variants) and explain all such variants by conditioning their occurrences with illustrations ii) to describe the use of pronouns in different linguistic as well as socio cultural contexts (formal and informal) and condition all such usages with relevant illustrations.

1.4 Research Questions

1.4.1. What are the honorific singular forms denoting second and third person pronouns? Do they have variant forms? If so how are they conditioned?

1.4.2. Identifying the formation and use of third person pronouns in Malaysian Spoken Tamil. Are there any reflexive pronouns in the Malaysian Spoken Tamil (in noun and verb structures?) If so how to explain their structure and use?

1.4.3. How many types of plural pronouns are found in First Person like inclusive plural and exclusive plural and how they are used in the Malaysian Spoken Tamil? Are there any restrictions in the use of Exclusive plural /na:ńka(l)?

1.4.4. How the pronouns are used in some of the socio cultural contexts and situations? What are the conditions for their occurrence?

1.4.5. Is it possible to identify subject – predicate agreement in the structure of pronouns? If so how?

1.5 The scope of the study

Basically this study is limited to the description of the pronouns found in the Malaysian spoken variety of Tamil which was conducted based on the data collected from the native speakers of Tamil. The data were gathered from the audio voice recording of the respondents by conducting interviews. The researcher used different methods like questionnaire administration (direct interview) method observation method, etc. As the investigator herself is a native speaker of Tamil language, she was able to check the data collected through field work based on her own data. Data gathered through secondary sources like media - television, radio, and newspapers / journals etc form part of the data for this research. The researcher also made voice recording of the native speakers of Tamil. All the sixty respondents were asked questions in Tamil, English and Malay (depending upon the need and context) to elicit the Spoken Tamil data.

1.6 Significance of the study

This study is basically about the correlating structure and use of Tamil with particular reference to pronouns. So far, no systematic study has been undertaken with reference to pronouns in the Malaysian Spoken Tamil. So, a study of this kind will help to enrich the learning and teaching activities of Tamil to choose appropriate forms one has to use in different linguistic and socio cultural contexts. Also this would help to identify the social significance of language use. This kind of study would help to enhance the description of Modern Tamil in the Malaysian context.

1.7 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed more precisely the background, the statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, the research questions raised to accomplish the main objectives of this research, scope and significance and use of the study. This chapter also gives an idea of the history of Indians in Malaysia as well as the variety of Tamil they use.