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English Borrowings in Jaffna Tamil

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Abstract

This study looks specifically at the language contact of two of the world's most visible languages and details of the resultant language change when words from English are borrowed into Tamil. Borrowed words, or loan words were collected in Jaffna in June, 2007. The loan words were then analyzed for phonological, morphosyntactic, semantic, and sociolinguistic factors. The frequency of English loan words was found to have increased in Tamil in the past decade, particularly in the realms of technology and communication, culture and entertainment, and politics. The borrowings are consequently spoken and understood by younger interlocutors and speakers. Socioeconomic, cultural, political, and geographical factors may make two languages co-exist and inevitably the languages influence each other.

The following key words would be focused in the study:

Borrowings
Language Contact
Sri Lankan Tamil
Jaffna Tamil

1.0 Language Contact and Borrowing

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Like human beings, language may also be considered a living organism, which is subjected to both decay and development. Total vocabulary of an individual is not constant at any age and time in his/her life span. It is constantly subjected to change. The new experiences may bring subtle changes in the individual's vocabulary by adding some items to his/her vocabulary. The words that are in his/her total vocabulary may get deleted because of lack of opportunities for him/her to use those items, or because of the circumstances, which demand and maintain the use of such items, do not exist anymore, or some of the words of the total stock may acquire new meanings. Similarly, contact with new cultures, new knowledge, and other languages do cause an advent of new concepts into a language, and these concepts are made available to the users of that language through new words or new conventions in the use of existing words. When this contact generally necessitates the mutual flow of ideas and concepts, naturally there will be need for vocabulary that captures these concepts adequately in both the languages.

Two or more languages are said to be in contact, if the same person uses them alternately. The individuals using the languages are the focus of the contact. Bilingualism is the practice of alternately using two languages and the persons involved are bilinguals. As a result of language contact, there have been instances of deviations from the norms of either language. These deviations occurring in the speech of bilinguals because of the familiarity with more than one language are referred to as interference. The term interference implies the rearrangements of patterns resulting from the infiltration of foreign elements into the highly structured domains of language such as the Phonemic system, Morphology and Syntax and some area of vocabulary. Such transfer of elements from one language into the other is called borrowing in general.

As far as the amount of differences or similarities between the languages is concerned, extreme similarity or extreme dissimilarity between languages is said to be an unfavourable condition of language interference. The mere contact of two languages is not supposed to lead to a situation in which one language borrows elements from the other language. Two conditions are essential for borrowing to occur. The meaning of the borrowed word should be comprehended by the person intending to adopt that word in his/her language or he/she should convincingly assume as if he/she has comprehended.

One language borrows from another not only for the reason that the recipient language lacks such terms. But due to the contact of foreign languages, terms infiltrate into the recipient language causing changes in the recipient language and not in the donor language. Borrowings of certain items take place only under the condition of large scale bilingualism and the borrowing of some other kind of items occurs under the condition of large scale monolingualism. It is the basic vocabulary of a language which is subject to borrowing under the latter condition. Further, the possibility for borrowing is greater under the latter condition.

Situation in Sri Lankan Tamil

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As far as Sri Lankan Tamil is concerned, the majority of words have been borrowed from Sanskrit. Tamil and Sanskrit came into contact through ethnic, cultural, and religious interaction in India. A large number of Sanskrit words are mingled with Tamil in literature authored by Indian writers and such literature has been used as texts in state schools and universities in Sri Lanka. That's how mingling of Sanskrit words entered Sri Lankan Tamil. The following examples could be mentioned in support of that.

Sanskrit	Tamil
Arya	Aryan (A member of the people who spoke the parent language of the Indo-European languages)
Chakra	Chakram (wheel, circle)
Panditah	Pantithan (learned scholar)
Sutra	Sutram (a set of grammar or Hindu law or philosophy.)

Sri Lanka was ruled by Portuguese, Dutch, and English around 1505, 1650, and 1796 respectively. The languages came into contact with the native languages including Tamil via administrative, educational, religious, and legal set up and subsequently a number of borrowed words from the above languages entered Sri Lankan Tamil.

Portuguese	Tamil
armário	alumāri (cupboard)
ananás	annāsi (pineapple)
kaju	kaju (cashew)
mesa	mēcai (table)
pão	pān (bread)

Due to the changes in the physical, political, economic, social and cultural environment, a need arises for new meanings and such need is met by extension or transfer of the already existing words of a language. However, there may be a great demand for new words as well. The chief sources of new words are borrowing, derivation, compounding and clipping. Borrowing is the most important source of new words.

Jaffna Tamil

A considerable part of present day Jaffna Tamil is made up of borrowed words. It is true that the core of the Tamil vocabulary including the function words dealing with fundamental and relatively unchanging realities remains native.

The English borrowings in Tamil are pronounced differently by monolinguals or even by bilinguals sometimes, since the sound system of Tamil differs from that of English. In casual Language in India www.languageinindia.com

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discussions, assimilated forms of borrowings are used by interlocutors who may be all bilinguals or bilinguals and monolinguals. Monolinguals may tend to assimilate the English sound into Tamil, due to unfamiliarity with the English sound system.

The writers of modern Tamil literature attempt to introduce new genres and adopt western literature modes in their works. They intend to bridge the divisions that exist between the themes, language, and style of traditional literature and that of western, mainly the English influence that is becoming increasingly a part of the experience and way of life of Tamils. To achieve this target, they concentrate on a new literary language which is flexible enough to express the social and intellectual set up and which can reach out to a wide middle class reading public which is eager for reading material but not intellectually competent enough to read classical literature. Under such circumstances, a lot of English borrowings are found to enter the modern Tamil Literature.

As far as Jaffna Tamil is concerned, the parts of speech especially nouns, verbs, adjectives and the rudimentary vocabulary in English are used as borrowings under the condition of large scale bilingualism. For instance, the English nouns such as Radio, Cycle, Computer, Studio, Sofa etc. are borrowings in Jaffna Tamil in their assimilated forms as re:ṭio:, caiki!, kampu: ṭar , istu:ṭio:, sopa:, etc. respectively.

Likewise, English verbs such as Test, Try, help, Taste, Cut, Join, etc. are borrowings in Jaffna Tamil in their assimilated forms as testu, rai, kelpu, te:stu, kaṭ yoyin, etc respectively. These borrowings take the Tamil verb form paṇṇu (Do) to harmonize with the Tamil syntactic structure.

Examples of Tamil sentences

- 1) “Vayarai yoyin paṇṇu”
(Join the wire)
- 2) “Vattiyai test paṇṇu”
(Check the battery)

English adjectives such as Neat, Dry, Round, Easy, etc. are used as borrowings in Jaffna Tamil in assimilated forms as ni:tu, rai, ravuṇṭu, i:si etc. respectively. These types of borrowings take the Tamil form “a:” the shortened form of “a:ha”(to become) to comply with the Tamil syntactic rules.

Examples of Tamil sentences

- 1) “araia ni:ta: itukku”
(The room is neat)
- 2) “kaṇakku i:sia: itukku”
(The sum is easy)

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The borrowed English words of the above types are well-known among bilinguals of Tamil and English. These types of English words generally occur in the contexts like code-switching and code-mixing in the speech of Jaffna Tamils. Hence, these types of borrowings are used under the condition of large scale bilingualism.

People of the labour class and peasantry deal with artifacts to a larger extent because of their occupations. The English words such as Hammer, Screwdriver, pickaxe, etc. are very widespread among them and these names have become borrowings in assimilated forms as a:mær, isku:traivar, pikka:n, etc. respectively. As the majority of the working class people in Jaffna are Tamil monolinguals, the lexicon for artifacts is liable to be borrowed very easily.

After the mother tongue replaced English as the medium of instruction, though English bilingualism declined to a considerable extent, the scientific and technological development internationally has led to the entry of several hundred English technical terms into day- to- day speech of the natives. Such terms are frequently used even by many monolinguals that may be traders, industrialists, and mechanics, employees of government as well as private sectors and ordinary members of the public.

Impact of English

As a site of colonization, first by the Portuguese, then the Dutch, and finally the English, Sri Lanka has had successive connections with three European nations. The English language, however, has had an unparalleled impact on the island because previous colonial powers were uninterested in disseminating their culture beyond proselytization to the native population (Fernando, 1977). Under the Treaty of Amiens, a British civil administration succeeded Dutch control of the island and Ceylon was declared a British Crown colony in 1802. In yoking, what had previously been three separate kingdoms together into this colony, the British also established English as a language of high status in the island.

1.1 Objective of the Study

This research is an effort to assess the extent to which the general communication has been made easy and effective through the use of the vocabulary of English in Tamil. English borrowings which entered Tamil lexicon from 1993 to 2006 have been focused on this research. Phonological changes of borrowings were extensively analysed by Suseendirajah (1993). It is encouraging to mention that now much prominence is given to the formulation of technical terminology in Tamil. Strenuous endeavors are being taken at the state level in India and Sri-Lanka in this regard. It has been planned to entail people with high competency and expertise in both languages in this mission. The coexistence of English borrowings and their Tamil equivalents will further extend the range of the Tamil language.

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More or less all the English borrowings are utilized in their transliterated forms in the conversations of Tamils, though some borrowings have translated forms. In writing, the transliterated as well as translated forms are used. Transliterated forms can partly supplement the lack of translated forms. In view of this aspect, this empirical research might be fruitful to ones who have begun to create technical terminology in Tamil. For instance, the translated form 'mani' and the transliterated form 'bellu' are used for the English bell. Usually, the translated forms are generally applied in literary form of speech and writing and transliterated forms are used in casual or colloquial communication. While transliterating an English word, it is written in the Tamil scripts mostly with phonetic modification.

1.2 The Research Area

The research area of this study covers the Divisional Secretariats in Jaffna, Nallur, and Kopay. Teachers, academic and non academic staff of the university of Jaffna, doctors, and shopkeepers in private and government sectors were the subjects of the study. As this research is on the use of English borrowings specifically among monolinguals, these areas were chosen for the study, because in these areas Tamil monolinguals live mostly. Further, the Tamil monolinguals have close contacts with bilinguals in these areas and there are better chances for the language contact situations and for the presence of a good number of English borrowings in Jaffna Tamil.

1.3 Research Methodology

a) To collect information pertaining to the use of English borrowings and the attitude of the people who use English borrowings, a random sample of 400 Jaffna Tamil monolinguals that comprise 200 students, 100 teachers, and 100 other professionals in various government departments were chosen. The qualitative methods were adopted for data collection. Questionnaires were handed down to the subjects and the data gathered from subjects' responses were investigated and findings were obtained. Some subjects came out with their comments about the model of the questionnaire. The options were given in the questionnaire but they had some other answer options that were not given in the questionnaire. Then the subjects were instructed to write their answer below the options. Data collection took three months and the analysis of data covered a period of 3 months from March, 2007 to June, 2007. The research was carried out in Jaffna.

b) 50 subjects consisting of 5 hospital attendants, 10 farmers, 10 masons, 10 university office aides, 10 traders, and 5 mechanics in Jaffna were chosen with a view to getting information pertaining to assimilation of English borrowings. The selected subjects were familiar with the researcher. The interviews were conducted in very relaxed and comfortable surroundings, although 'the possibility of interlocutor effect is virtually inescapable in the interview context' (Hannah 1997: 349 cited in Yeoh and Huang (ed.) 2002). The occasional presence of laughter during the interview sessions, however, makes it possible to conclude that the informants' behaviour is casual at times. The interviews contain jokes, a whole range of personal topics, references to social events, money, food, etc. As the purpose of the interviews was to obtain

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large bodies of spoken data, a single interview generally lasted about half an hour or a little longer. Prior to the interviews I had prepared a list of 20 interview questions. However, the tone of the interviews was kept informal. Interviews went on for three months from June, 2007. to August, 2007. The subject matter discussed was based on the chief occupation of each interviewee and during the discussion they were told that the intention of the interview was for a research.

1.4 Major Findings from the Data Analysis

The major findings from the data investigation in relation to the use of English borrowings are established on the responses elicited from the questionnaires. The key findings answer the basic questions posed in relation to the use of English borrowings in this specific target group of people. The four hundred subjects were issued two different questionnaires designed for the undergraduates of the University of Jaffna and for the officers working in Jaffna city. Most of the students are monolinguals or low level bilinguals. They started learning English from their childhood but have not achieved communicative competence. In the case of staff, many of them are bilinguals or low level bilinguals and they acquired communicative competence in English after graduation

The research area and the methodology involved to gather data are described in sections 1.8 in chapter-I of this thesis.

The model questionnaires designed for students and officers are found in Appendix AI and Appendix AII

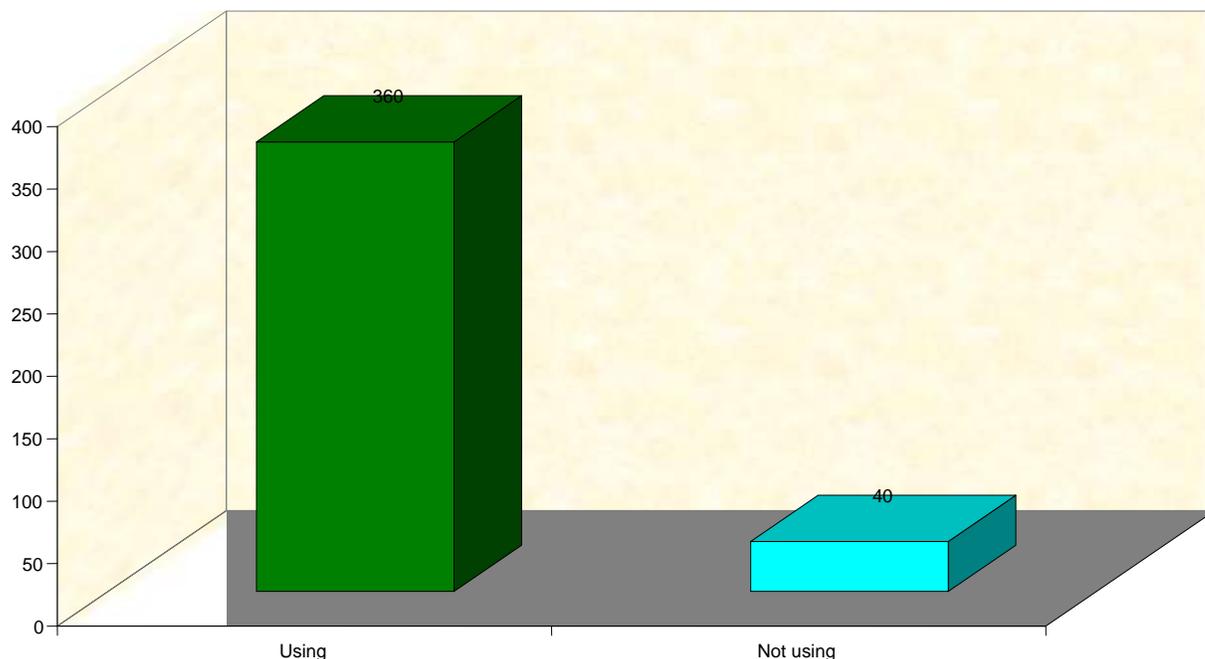
The results are as follows:

1. The majority of the subjects irrespective of age and sex use English borrowings in their day to day interactions.

Out of 400, 360 subjects (90%) said they use English borrowings and 40 (10%) subjects said that they don't (see Graph-I)

Graph-I

The use of English Borrowings among the Jaffna Tamil Monolinguals



2. The majority of the subjects that use English borrowings have a positive attitude towards the use of them.

The data collected from the questionnaires point out that 392 (98%) subjects confirm the use of English borrowings. Only 8(2%) subjects show negative attitude toward the use of English borrowings. (see Graphs-II A&B)

The reasons forwarded by the subjects who approved the use of English borrowings are given below.

- 1) Subjects do not know the Tamil equivalents or translations
- 2) Tremendous acquaintance with the usage of English borrowings.
- 3) Verbal comfort in using the English borrowings
- 4) English borrowings are shorter in speech.

The reasons said by the subjects who have negative attitude toward the use of English borrowings are mentioned below.

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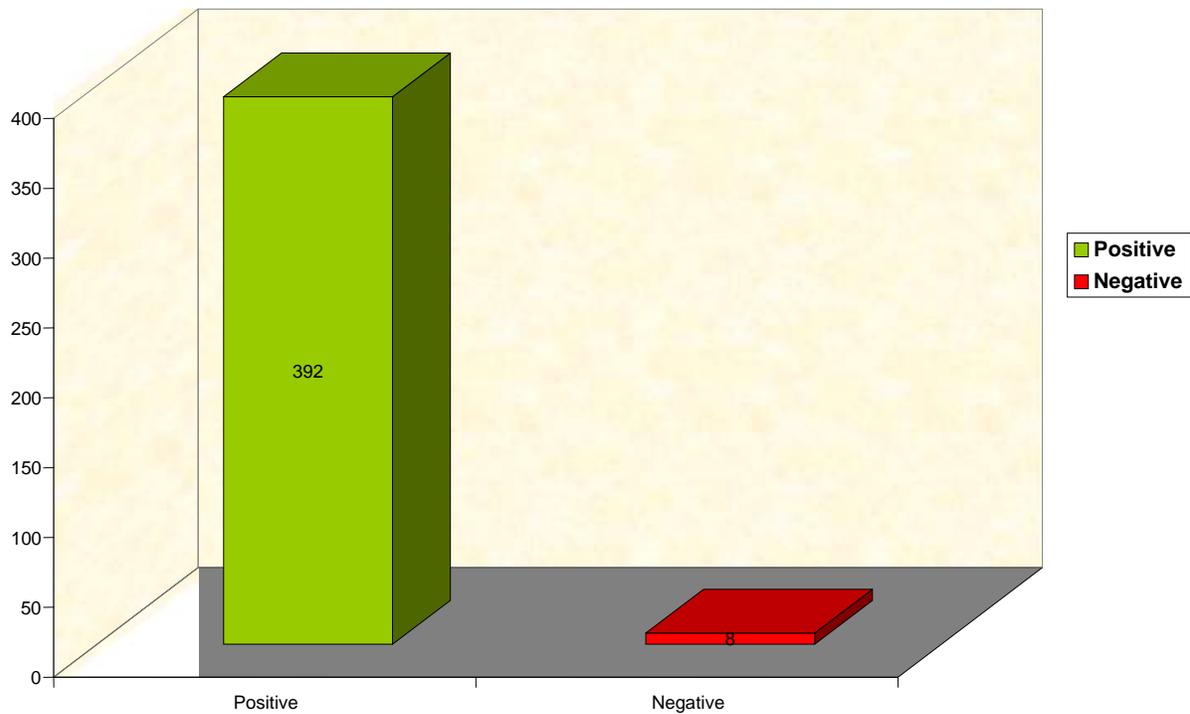
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- 1) Difficulty in pronouncing the English borrowings.
- 2) Other interlocutors may not be able to comprehend the English borrowings.

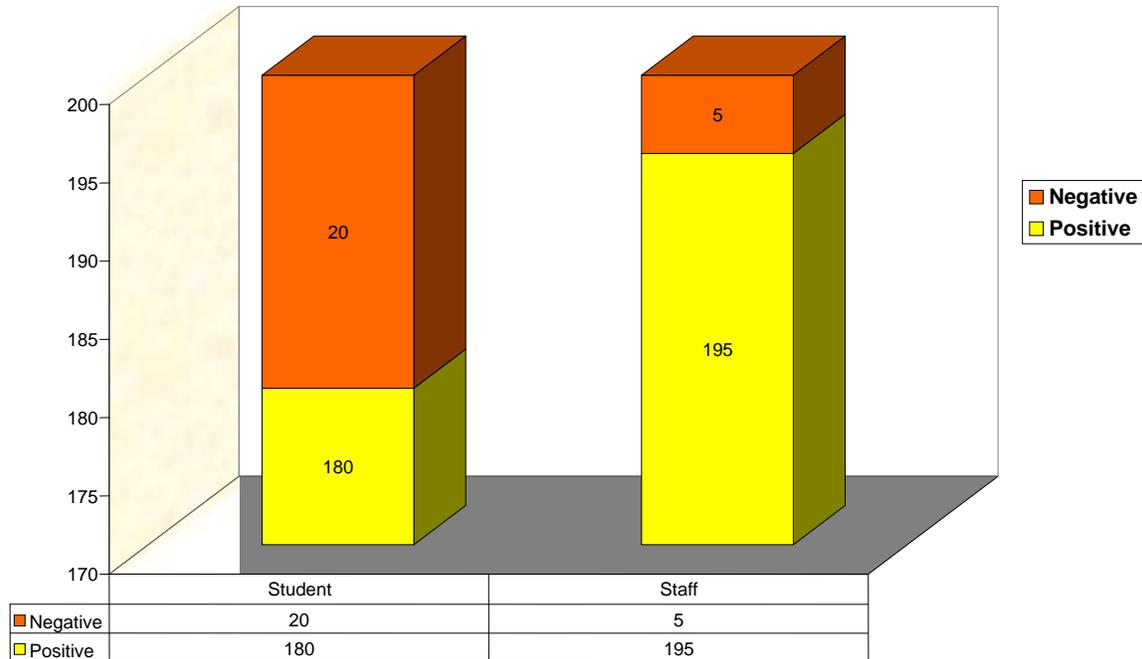
Graph-IIA

Attitudes towards the Use of English Borrowings



Graph-IIB

People who have positive attitude towards the people who use English borrowings



III) The responses from the questionnaires point out that 346 (96%) subjects don't know the Tamil counterparts or translations for the English borrowings used by them. Merely 14 (4%) subjects are acquainted with Tamil equivalents or translations, but they do not want to use them in their interaction for the reasons given below (see Graph-III).

- 1) Tamil counterparts or translations are relatively longer in utterances
- 2) Other interlocutors won't have the competence to understand the Tamil equivalents or translations.
- 3) Greater verbal effort will be involved in the utterances of Tamil counterparts or translations.

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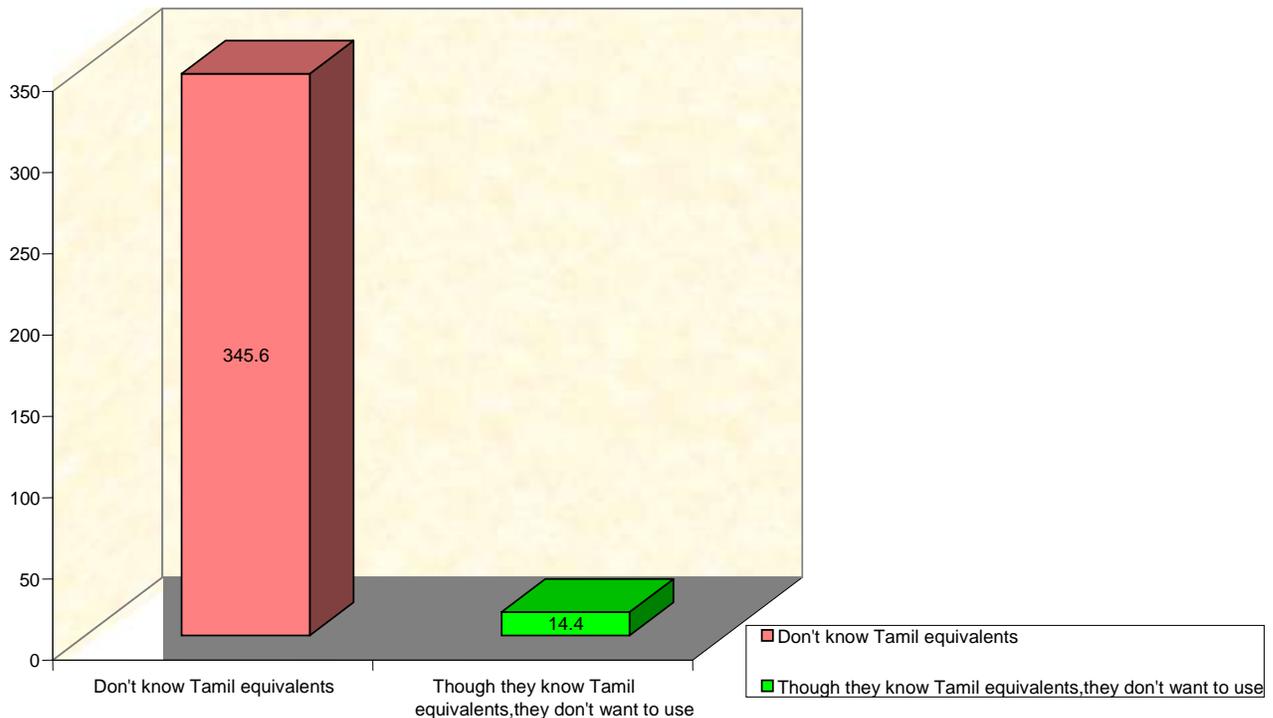
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Graph-III

Reasons for using English borrowings-chart



1.5.1 Mind-set toward the use of English borrowings

D) The subjects who expressed positive attitudes towards the use of English borrowings accept the wider use of them in various spheres, such as home, social interaction, thought, religion and occupation.

To make certain the subjects' knowledge of their use of English borrowings, they were questioned as to their use of English borrowings in different fields. The questionnaire data brought out particular cases of the use of English borrowings. Graph -IV sums up the

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questionnaire data in relation to the responses of the subjects on the use of English borrowings in various spheres.

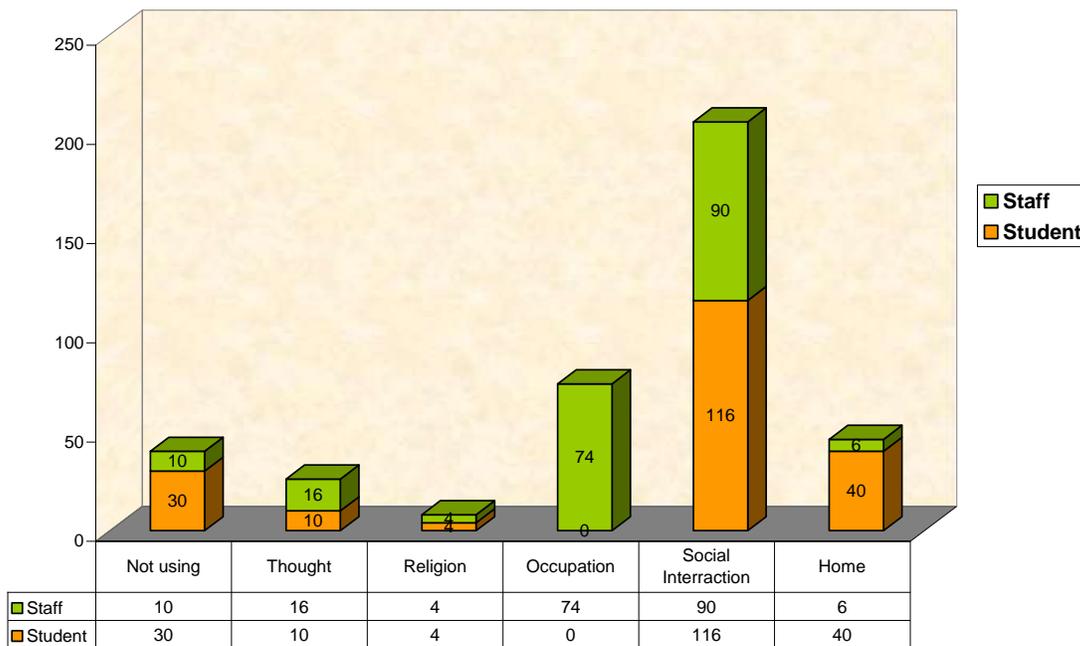
Graph-IV demonstrates in short what the subjects had to say regarding their use of English borrowings. Subjects in general seem to be aware that they make use of English borrowings in the spheres of home, social interaction, thought, religion and occupation.

The responses from the staff's questionnaire indicate that in occupation and social interaction, out of 200 subjects 164(82%) subjects use English borrowings

Out of 400 subjects, 26(6.5%) subjects confirmed that their thinking process is highly influenced by English borrowings, that is, responses (26) from the students and the staffs indicate that in their mind they think in English word before they use it. These 26 subjects seem to visualize the things in English as their first language. To that extent they are influenced by English borrowings. (see Graph-IV)

Graph-IV

Distribution of the use of English borrowings in different spheres- Chart-IV



II) Subjects have positive attitude towards the people who use English borrowings.

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Subjects were questioned as to what sort of opinion they would have of a person using English borrowings when the person communicates with the subjects. Their responses are given in Graph-II (B).

The data gathered from the questionnaire shows that 392(98%) subjects have positive mind set and only 8(2%) subjects show negative attitude towards the people that use English borrowings in communication with the subjects.

1.6 Factors Contributing to Borrowing

There certain factors which make Jaffna people make use of English borrowings in day-to-day life

1.6.1 Prestige Motive

People of authority, power, and privilege get respect in a society and people generally approve the custom and speech of these people of the elite group. The kinship terms such as “Daddy”, “Mummy” and “Aunt” are preferred to the Tamil “appa”, “amma” and “ma:mi” respectively. There have been cases where Tamils imitated the English people in verbal communication and culture to reach status. “Romance and sex inform a further set of glosses. Since these experiences are often associated with a liberal western culture, such comments are written in English. Susan seated beside Joe in a concert (unit 9a) says ‘Love me’, while Laura leaning towards Bruce says ‘Kiss me’. Students also send messages to each other, like ‘Meena loves Sugirthan’ (Canagaraja,1997).

1.6.2 Need filling Motive

Permitting of a foreign lexicon into a language might be motivated due to the absence of a term to refer to an object or a concept in that language. New experiences, new objects, and new practices form the necessary environment for entering the foreign words into language. Instances for English borrowings in Tamil in this respect: Television, army, vote etc.

1.6.3 Concealing Social Identity

The meanings of certain words in the native language are regarded as insulting and the equivalent words in another language are treated as cultured. The English “carpenter” and “toddy tapper (brewer)” are chosen to the Tamil caste names, “taccan” and “nalavan” by the members of these castes.

1.6.4 Register Influence

Registers are firmly built up in all languages. For example, the administrative, political, technological, and legal registers go through Englishization. As these registers have a firm root

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in the local languages, it is generally difficult to introduce the equivalents in the local languages and get the natives familiar with such equivalents although they are available. For instance, the English “Battery” is in practice among the monolingual Tamils with some phonological difference.

1.6.5 Interpreting Facility

A borrowed word may be applied as a tool for elucidation and interpretation. Specifically, in languages where registers are not steadied or have not got common acknowledgement, borrowed lexis enjoy an outstanding position. For instance, people find it simpler to interpret the Tamil term ‘piṭṭiyānai’ by denoting its English equivalent ‘warrant’.

1.6.6 Neutralization

A borrowed lexicon may function as a source of neutralization. The borrowed lexical item might be attitudinally and contextually neutral. The contextual hints for recognition are not present in it. For instance, the English ‘mother’ referring to maternal kinship is sometimes preferred to the Tamil ‘t̪a:l’ (Literary form) or ‘amma:’ (colloquial form).

The use of some words that are considered shameful for public discussion are replaced by English words. For instance, the word ‘attain’ is used in its assimilated form “attæn” to denote the menstruation of a girl among Jaffna Tamils. Likewise, ‘lanŋ ka:ncer’(Lung Cancer), ‘blat testu’(Blood Test), ‘cheṭtu Pei:ṇnu’ (Chest Pain) etc. are in normal usage of Jaffna Tamils. The expressions are indicating the neutralization of English borrowings among Jaffna Tamil monolinguals

1.6.7 Marker of Modernization

A borrowed lexicon might be applied as a marker of modernization, socio economic position, and membership in an elite group. People who want to show their authority, power, or identity use it. A person who is an Assistant Government Agent by profession may not like to be addressed as ‘uṭavi araca:ṇkaṭipar’. He would rather like being called A.G.A

1.6.8 Economy of Usage

The necessity to designate new things, places, or concepts is also a reason for borrowing. More or less all the English names of carpentry and masonry tools and stationery are used with phonological modifications by Jaffna Tamils owing to the economy in usage. The term ‘ra:nuvam’ referring to the English word ‘army’ is a Hindi borrowing in Tamil(Janert,1977). This Hindi borrowing is preferred in literary speech or writing and the usage of the word ‘army’ in casual speech among the Tamil monolinguals is a common feature. The usage of the term ‘ira:nuvam’ in casual form of speech sounds very formal, highly literary or superior in tone and the word ‘army’ is preferred to ‘ira:nuvam’ on account of economy of expression.

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Examples: paper, copy, tester, plug etc.

The converted local Christians still bear the foreign names like Patrik, Milton, Mary, Jerard etc.

Lexis such as ‘prayer’, ‘confession’ and ‘Mass’ are very often used during the religious practices in Jaffna

Some names of places in Jaffna are also in English.

Examples: Jaffna, Kytes, Delft.

1.6.9 Discourse strategy

English borrowings are occasionally used as an approach in speech. Canagarajah quotes examples of English borrowings like ‘fis’ (fish), ‘kira:b’(crab), ‘pro:n’(Prawn), ‘master’ (Master), and ‘pirais’ used by fish vendors when talking to their customers to build up a cordial relationship with them in Jaffna.(1995:8).

It is quite obvious that due to lethargy Tamil equivalents for foreign words have not been found and as a result the foreign lexicon has penetrated into Tamil. It is worth mentioning the view of Jespersen in this regard.

“When a nation has once got into the habit of borrowing words, people will very often use foreign words where it would have been perfectly possible to express their ideas by means of native speech material, the reason for going out of one’s own language being in some cases the desire to be thought fashionable or refined through interluding one’s speech with foreign words, in others simply laziness” (Jespersen, P.210, cited in Varatharajan, 1975:96-97).

So far as English borrowings in Jaffna Tamil are concerned, words such as switch, fan, motor, printer, offset, inverter etc. remain English borrowings as no efforts are made to form the Tamil equivalents for these words due to lethargy.

1.6.10 Further Sources of Fresh Words

Although borrowing has been the main source of adding the words to a language, new words are formed in other ways as well.

1) Fresh words are formed by affixing a suffix from the local language with foreign lexis. For instance, in Jaffna Tamil discourse, the inflection “a” is mingled with some English words that are borrowings. This characteristic can be seen in the following examples.

prapplama: itukku (it is problematic)

kuḷita: itukku (It is cool)

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ro:ᅇka: itukku (It is wrong)

2) There have been instances of formation of new words, when some borrowed words go through changes in meaning. For instance, the word ‘taipist’ that is assimilated with English ‘Typist’ is used to mean only the female typist among Jaffna Tamil monolinguals. Similarly ‘steno;’

(Stenographer) is used to mean a female stenographer only.

The use of English borrowings in Jaffna Tamil has indeed extended the scope of Tamil to a greater extent, especially in its lexis. The adoption of English words makes communication easy with greater outcome and preferred goals. Huge advancement in economic and trade activities, transport systems, cultural intercourse and communicative systems have changed the life style of the people. Unless the language of a speech community is modified according to the changing systems, members of the speech community can’t gratify their wishes. Herein, the adoption of English lexicon in Jaffna Tamil and the consequent facilities in communication are advantageous to the community (Suntharesan, 2002).

1.7 Conclusion

Modern literature in Tamil produced by writers who are natives of Jaffna contain English borrowings amply, as the modern era witnesses the advent of new concepts of diverse branches of knowledge and the introduction of new articles as a result of vast development in science, technology, trade , communication etc. at international level. The developments in these fields have caused a sort of dramatic, revolutionary change in the life style of people which in turn has modified sharply the creative thinking as well as the style of criticism.

The presence of English borrowings enriches the contents of literature by providing it with novel dimensions that may appeal to the minds of the reader and serve as a device to convey ideas with striking effects. Further the modern literary works in Tamil produced by Jaffna writers provide documentary evidence for the influence of English borrowings in the social interaction of Jaffna Tamils.

The Modern Tamil writing free from literary terms of high variety Tamil but inclusive of ordinary words and phrases and borrowings accessible to the average reader marks the changing trend of literary tradition from classic into modernism. Modernism in literature gives awareness to the reader about social surrounding. The presence of English borrowings is an inevitable feature in modern Tamil literature of Jaffna in the sense that it inserts some new variety of elements onto the existing tradition.

The contact between English and Tamil, one of the national languages of Sri Lanka and the subsequent development of bilingualism led to the borrowings of many English words into Tamil. The verbal interaction between bilinguals and monolinguals in various contexts led to the infiltration of English words into the speech of Tamil monolinguals. The penetration of English

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words has indeed enriched and expanded the Jaffna Tamil vocabulary. The presence of English words has facilitated one's expression of the ideas with ease and effect.

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