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ABSTRACT

This final report describes the development of a textbook for advanced, spoken Tamil. There is a marked difference between literary Tamil and spoken Tamil, and training in the former is not sufficient for speaking the language in everyday situations with reasonably educated native speakers. There is difficulty in finding suitable material that illustrates standard colloquial usage. In the textbook described here, the transcriptions of five Tamil radio programs provide the spoken material. The reader consists of the texts of the five radio plays, page-by-page columnar glossaries, exercises, a synopsis grammar, a Tamil-English glossary, and an English-Tamil glossary. Technical and linguistic difficulties are described along with recommendations for future projects. References are listed. (VM)

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Final Report

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Reader for Advanced Spoken Tamil

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Preface

This reader, which consists of transcriptions of five Tamil radio plays, with exercises, notes and discussion, a synopsis grammar, a Tamil-English glossary, and an English-Tamil glossary, is intended for advanced students of Tamil who have had at least two years of instruction in the spoken language at the college level. The materials have been tested in classroom use and have been found to be suitable for use at the end of the second year of instruction for some advanced students, and later for less advanced students.

The radio plays which are here transcribed and annotated were originally broadcast over All-India Radio from the Trichy station during the winter and spring of 1966. The principal investigator was kindly granted permission by the then Program Director, Mrs. Venkataraman, to use these plays for pedagogical and research purposes. Tape recorded copies of the plays and the exercises we have prepared to accompany them are available from the Language Laboratory, 116 Denny Hall DH-40, University of Washington, Seattle, Washington 98195 at cost.

The five radio plays we have chosen are each approximately 30 minutes long in actual broadcast time. They deal with the day-to-day problems of the middle class Tamilian in modern urban society, in a humorous or tragic-comic way. As such, they are quite similar in thematic content to many radio and television situation comedies seen and heard daily in the United States, such as 'Fibber McGee and Molly,' 'I Love Lucy,' and 'Ozzie and Harriet,' to name a few classics of the genre. Their approach to the solution of the problems posed, the attitude toward lower-status characters and to women, and the general level of humor, however, reflect the mores of contemporary Indian, and especially Tamilian, society. There has been no attempt to edit the material for content or thematic treatment; we have tried to present the material exactly as it was originally broadcast, with editorializing done only to make certain phonological sequences clearer, or to correct obvious slips of the tongue.

The spoken dialect in which the plays were originally broadcast is the non-Brahmin dialect of educated speakers of mainland Tamil. It is probably more or less identical to the dialect used in most movies made in Tamil-Nadu today, and reflects also the speech of educated middle-class speakers of Tamil, which has been called Standard Colloquial Tamil, for which we use the abbreviation ST or SCT. Occasionally certain actors speaking the parts in the plays have departed from this norm, and we have in these cases regularized these differences to conform to the norm. Brahminisms, slips of the tongue, omissions, additions of extraneous material, and outright mistakes have been handled in this way.

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Introduction

Summary. The activity carried on under this contract has been to prepare a reader for advanced spoken Tamil by transcribing the texts of five radio plays originally broadcast over All-India Radio, providing a running columnar glossary, notes and discussion to explain any difficulties, exercises utilizing difficult new material in the text, and finally a summary or synopsis grammar of Spoken Tamil together with a Tamil-English glossary and an English-Tamil Glossary. Problems encountered were the great difficulty of transcription of rapidly spoken tape-recorded material, where often the actors reading the various parts made slips of the tongue or did not speak clearly enough for a clear decision to be made as to what was either actually said or should have been said. In cases of doubt the editors made the decision to record things in a manner consistent with the context, sometimes leaving the error, sometimes correcting it. Great difficulty was also encountered in the preparation of the glossaries. It is clear that a major desideratum in many of the languages not widely studied in the west is the immediate need for good bilingual dictionaries and glossaries, prepared by competent linguist-lexicographers.

Introduction: Background

Tamil, the principal language of Tamil-Nad (Madras State), India, has approximately 30 million speakers, according to the census of 1961, and is also a semi-official language of Ceylon and Malaysia. The literature of Tamil dates from the early centuries of the Christian era, and because of its originality and lack of relation to the Aryan tradition in India, has been of interest to western scholars since almost the arrival of Europeans in India beginning with the Portuguese.

Because of its prestigious literature, and for various other socio-cultural and political reasons, Literary Tamil has remained conservative and out of step with the ongoing changes in the spoken language, Standard Colloquial Tamil. More than any other language of India, Tamil exhibits "diglossia" to such an extent that illiterates in Tamil-Nad can not understand the spoken version of the Literary dialect when they hear it broadcast on All-India Radio, or when it is used in other formal situations.

The westerner, too, finds that the language he may have learned using various available texts on the Literary dialect to be of practically no use in speaking with Tamilians, particularly illiterates. And even if he succeeds in communicating with a few educated people, who usually also know English, he finds that most of what is said by people around him completely escapes his comprehension. This is because the study of Tamil until quite recently has been mostly the study of Literary Tamil, while the spoken language has been neglected except for a few phrase books designed to help the tourist, the British officer, and the tea planter.

In recent years, of course, various universities in the west have begun teaching Tamil, and in most cases at least the first year of instruction, and perhaps some of the second, are devoted to the study of the spoken language. Usually the Literary language is introduced during the first year, and during the second year of instruction, it gradually supplants the teaching of spoken Tamil, so that any more advanced study of the language is usually devoted to the Literary language.

The problem with this tradition of teaching Tamil, even though it is far superior to the previous tradition, where the spoken language was not taught at all, is that the American, let us say, arriving in Tamil-Nad to begin his research in anthropology, politics, geography, or whatever, still cannot communicate with the people around him. This stems, not from his having received faulty training, but simply from the fact that one or more years of training in spoken Tamil is not adequate training for undertaking original social science research using live informants in the field. Secondly, a westerner with this training usually finds that many Tamilians have a smattering of English which is functionally the equivalent of his one and a half years of spoken Tamil, so that each can talk to the other in his own language about the price of bananas, the distance to the railroad station, and the availability of hotel rooms, but beyond that, communication ceases entirely. Neither can say any more in the other's language, and the westerner who decides to plow ahead on his own may spend many frustrating months perfecting his spoken Tamil before any real work can begin.

What has been needed, of course, are materials in spoken Tamil which bring the student up to the level of minimal fluency in the spoken language, using whatever

texts are available which are the equivalents of complicated conversations between reasonably educated native speakers of Tamil. This problem, of course, is the crux of the matter, and is one of the reasons, though not the only one, that such materials have not been available. Since the Literary dialect is used in all printed Tamil, and is used also almost exclusively in radio broadcasting, it is extremely difficult to get texts of complicated conversations between reasonably educated native speakers of Tamil which have some generality and originality.

All-India Radio, fortunately, does not broadcast exclusively in Literary Tamil. During a field trip to India in 1965-66, I was able to obtain copies of broadcasts of a radio play series entitled cuuryakaanti (Sunflower) broadcast in spoken Tamil. These five plays, each thirty minutes in length, have been transcribed, edited, annotated, and adapted for classroom use.

Methods

Our methodology has been to take the tape recordings of five Tamil radio plays and adapt them for classroom use by transcribing and analyzing them grammatically, providing them with notes, discussion and glossaries, and with a summary grammar of the spoken language. This has all been compiled into a two-part "reader" of advanced spoken Tamil.

To accompany the original portions of each play, we have provided a repeat of each scene read slowly by a native speaker, as well as with the exercises accompanying each scene in Tamil with an English translation. Sufficient time is left for the student to repeat the material on the tape.

The actual transcription and analysis of the materials has been a laborious and time-consuming process. Because the material was broadcast live with no subsequent editing, many slips of the tongue or other errors occur which could not easily be eliminated from the original. The material is also in general spoken at a very rapid rate, making it difficult to understand what actual phonological sequences occur, even though the general drift is clear to a native speaker. Fade-ins and fade-outs, simultaneous talking by two or more characters, shouting, etc., are difficult to understand and transcribe without sometimes altering the sense of what was the author's intent.

In an attempt to overcome some of these transcription difficulties, a mechanical procedure was resorted to which involved an 'expander-compressor' device to slow down the rate of speech without changing the pitch. This consists of a tape recorder having four heads which revolve very quickly and strike the original tape in such a way that the same segment of tape is recorded on another tape up to four times. Actually, minute differences in the four recordings of each segment do occur, since the original tape is moving while this expanding is taking place, so that the expanded output is not as clear as one would like. The final output is somewhat garbled, as if everything had been spoken in a kind of tremolo voice. After some initial success with this device in slowing down certain difficult sequences so that they could be transcribed more accurately, a plan to incorporate these expanded versions along with the final version of each taped lesson was abandoned. The reason for abandoning this plan was that the expanded form was very unnatural, both in length and in voice quality, and

because many difficult phonological sequences remained unclear after expanding them. They were garbled or incorrect to begin with, and no amount of expanding them had the effect of clearing them up. The technique was useful in allowing the investigators to realize that they were dealing with something that would probably not be clear on the fast version, so that a better guess could be made as to what might be a reasonable representation for that utterance, but as a pedagogical aid the expanded versions were useless, and were thus not incorporated into the finished product.

In addition to these technical difficulties, there have also been linguistic difficulties with the structure of many sentences in the materials. Because of the heretofore exclusive attention of most linguists, as at least in India, to the grammar of Literary Tamil, there are some grammatical constructions in ST which have never been examined in any of the linguistic literature. These constructions have been difficult to analyze since they have no analogs in the Literary language, and thus are not discussed in the grammars of Literary Tamil. Also, they sometimes violate the rules of Literary Tamil, yet are perfectly grammatical for Spoken Tamil. An obvious example of a form which has no equivalent in LT but is widely used in ST is what I have called the 'obstinate negative' form. Many other examples can be found in the synopsis grammar (Part II) section of the report. Many of the aspectual auxiliaries and/or aspect markers are used differently in ST than in LT, also, to mention another example. We have had to handle these forms in whatever way seemed to be consistent with both the history and semantics of the language, whether they have received mention in the older literature or not. As a result, the synopsis grammar probably contains much information about ST which has previously never been found in print.

Having had the experience of the past to learn from as far as the presentation of the materials is concerned, we decided that the texts of the plays should be provided with a columnar glossary on each page, to eliminate most page-flipping while listening to the tapes. Notes and discussion which are too lengthy to fit this columnar glossary are provided at the end of each scene, as are the variation drills to accompany that scene. The synopsis grammar is designed to combine in one place all the grammatical information the student needs to understand the material. Examples used in the grammar are usually culled from the texts, but others are provided for more generality. Finally an English-Tamil glossary and a Tamil-English glossary are provided. As mentioned above, the glossary is one of the most difficult parts of such reports to compile. Glossaries are supposed to help students understand a given lexical item in its context, and the columnar glossary performs this function well. In isolation, as in the lists in the T-E and E-T glossaries, however, it becomes difficult to list the item in its meaning as found in the original context, and much more information must be provided. This becomes an onerous task, akin to compiling a complete or at least abridged dictionary of the language. Somewhere a middle ground between complete generality and specific contextual accuracy must be found, but this middle ground, if it in fact exists, seems to be a marshland with few safe footholds. During the work on the glossary we were confronted with this difficulty again and again, and the finished product probably reflects this wavering. Glossaries and dictionaries for Tamil are desperately needed, especially for the spoken language, but whether they can be prepared as a subservient part of a larger project is in question.

Findings and Analysis

Results. The body of results of this project is the production of a Reader for Advanced Spoken Tamil consisting of the texts of five radio plays together with page-by-page columnar glossaries, exercises, a synopsis grammar, a Tamil-English glossary, and an English-Tamil glossary. The plays treat the day-to-day problems of the lower middle class Tamilian in a humorous way, often similar to the situation comedies broadcast regularly on American broadcast media. Financial problems are a dominant theme--making ends meet, keeping up with the cost of living, even in plays where other themes, such as 'boy meets girl,' 'virtue triumphs over evil,' 'honesty is the best policy,' 'the best laid plans of mice and men,' 'time marches on,' etc.. are the main themes. Another theme that runs as an undercurrent in many of the plays is that of changing social mores, and the problems encountered when different people in the same family/society have different assumptions about their roles. In the play sinpIL Tii a lowly serving boy gets the girl, while her implied fiance loses her through his arrogance, boorishness, and cowardice. In general these plays are meant to entertain, rather than to instruct, so when the exigencies of providing a punch line or squeezing the denouement in before the 30 minutes is up are taken into account, the theme or content is often left almost unresolved. Probably a certain amount of padding also takes place if the original play does not happen to be exactly 30 minutes in length.

The value of these materials, then, lies not in literary content or thematic treatment, but in the fact that they represent idiomatic Tamil rapidly spoken in an interesting and humorous way, that is, connected speech that can serve as a model for a student wishing to emulate the Tamil of educated non-Brahmins. Initial response in class use has been that there is little boredom and much fun in using these materials, so that one of the major problems encountered in teaching is substantially reduced.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions. Having set out to attempt to produce some teaching materials for Spoken Tamil on an advanced level, we have presented five radio plays in transcription with glossaries, notes, and discussion which a student can use almost without an instructor to understand the materials. One of the filtering procedures used to ensure that this could be possible was that of having a research assistant (who had completed two years of study of Tamil) study the materials with only the notes, discussion, glossary, and grammar at her disposal. When she encountered difficulties she was allowed to consult other grammars, dictionaries, a native-speaker, or the principal investigator. Anything that could not be understood without this help was then added to the columnar glossaries, the notes and discussion, the grammar, and the glossaries. It is thus clear that an advanced student at about the third-year level could actually use these materials without an instructor, although they were designed to be used with an instructor. They thus fit the specification of 'Reader' since they can be read on the student's own time and discussed or re-evaluated during the class period.

Another desideratum which was accomplished by this project was to produce a concise grammar of Spoken Tamil which can be used by students at all levels,

both to accompany these materials and independently. It is the principal investigator's intent to revise this grammar after use, and to have it published later in a final and expanded form.

A final conclusion from this study is that the preparation of glossaries, while exceedingly important, should be carried on as an independent project, perhaps as a sequel to another project. Glossaries must be prepared after the other work is finished, and because of this time pressure, and of the notion that a glossary is only a minor part of the whole project, its preparation can suffer from this last-minute neglect.

Recommendations

It is recommended that these materials be used starting at the end of the second year or the beginning of the third year of Tamil instruction. They are difficult for a student without much practice in dealing with complex and rapid speech, and are not suitable for earlier use. Attempts to use it earlier met with frustration and boredom on the part of the students not prepared to handle this level.

It is also recommended that the texts be used in conjunction with the tapes, which can be ordered from the Language Laboratory, 116 Denny Hall DH-40, University of Washington, Seattle, Washington 98195, at cost. The tapes consist of each scene in its original form as broadcast, followed by a slower version read by a native speaker, and finally by variation drill exercises designed to call attention to the new and difficult material in that scene. A well-motivated and intelligent advanced student might be able to use the materials without much supervision from an instructor, if desired, since this has been found to work in at least one case with at least the first two plays.

Supplementary Materials

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