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English Borrowings in the Modern Tamil Literature and Tamil Lexicon

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Abstract

When two or more languages in contact, they borrow words from each other as borrowings facilitate communication between people. English borrowings are enormously used by the writers of various kinds nowadays and it is well acclaimed by many people from all levels. Since English borrowings make communication easy, many writers opt to use English borrowings in their literary works in order to make the readers understand the contents well.

Many Tamil equivalents to English borrowings are not used and English borrowings are used to express things clear when they write poems, plays, fictions, and short stories in Tamil. This paper captures the use of English borrowings in literary works produced by Tamil writers in Jaffna. To analyze the impact of use of English borrowings in Tamil literature, some literary works produced by Jaffna Tamil writers are taken for discussion.

Key words: English borrowings, Tamil literature, Jaffna Tamil

1.0 Introduction

The features and functions of English borrowings in Tamil writings are discussed in this paper. A few examples of English borrowings from fiction, poetry and drama in Tamil written from 1990 up to date and a Tamil lexicon titled “kriyaa:vin taṭka:laṭ Tamil” have been chosen for analysis.

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It is assumed that the selected Tamil writings of Jaffna writers will reflect the culture of Jaffna Tamil society and unavoidably show evidence of the use of English borrowings in society.

Though the chief lexicographers of the Tamil lexicon that has been chosen for analysis are Indian scholars, a Sri Lankan Tamil scholar Dr. M.A. Nuhuman (Karunakaran, 2008) has contributed as an assistant lexicographer in completing this lexicon. Moreover, it is the only Tamil lexicon which comprises some English borrowings found in Indian Tamil as well as in Sri Lankan Tamil.

An effort has been made initially to assess the effect of English on Tamil writings. Especially the effect of English on Tamil literary traditions and the consequent changes have been analyzed

1.1 English Borrowings in the Modern literature

The modern literature has the tendency of deviating from the conventional style and adopting a casual style implying the exclusion of highly literary terms belonging to the high variety of Tamil and the inclusion of plain ordinary words and phrases which are easily accessible to the average reader. This tendency can be observed in the literature publications of Jaffna Tamil writers also. The poems by the late Rudramoorthy, A. Jesurasa, E. Murugaian, Kokila Mahendiran, S. Patmanathan, P. Sivapalan and N. Shanmugalingan and plays by N. Sundarampillai, who are all Jaffna writers can be cited in this respect. The modern Tamil literature accommodates ordinary words and phrases and English borrowings as well.

1.2 English Borrowings in Tamil Plays

Example- 1

In the Play titled “Na:lai NallaNa:l”, the loan words “Ma:ster” (Master) and “Poro:kar” (Broker) are seen among some other English loan words. The characters that use these loan words in a conversation are portrayed as uneducated, average persons. The loan word “Ma:star” is very repeatedly used by Jaffna Tamil monolinguals to denote a male teacher. The Tamil equivalents “Guru” “a:sitiyar” and “upa:tiya:yar” etc. are normally used in literary form of speech and writing. These are not used in informal dialogues. Likewise, the word “Puro: kar” etc., are commonly used in literary form of speech and writing. These are not used in informal dialogue. In the same way, the word “puro: k:ar”, a fully assimilated form of the English word ‘Broker’ is used to denote particularly a marriage broker in the Jaffna social setting. The Tamil equivalent “tarakar” for Broker is found in the literary form of writing only. Because of the acquaintance of the ordinary people with the above mentioned loan words and as the situation of the play is reflected through dialogue, these loan words have been chosen by the writer of this play (Sivapalan, 2001, P.03).

Example – 2

The loan words “keitu” (Gate), “pilsu” (Pill) and “seitfu” (Church) are some of the English loan words used in the play titled, “Nii Seita Naatakame”. The Tamil equivalents and

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translations *patalai*, *ma:tirai* or *matuntu kulisai* are respectively accessible for these loan words. But, in the Jaffna spoken Tamil, in consideration of the economy of effort, these loan words are usually used. Both Tamil monolinguals and bilinguals in Tamil and English use these loan words in their casual speech.

The characters that use the above borrowings in this play are portrayed as uneducated normal people and therefore the writer has selected these loan words to impress the readers with a well-known, informal environment (Shanmugalingam, 2002, p.5.6,13).

Example – 3

The loan words “*tiusan*” (tuition) and “*pa:su*” (Pass) are in enormous usage among the monolinguals in Jaffna today. The student population is much higher than before and almost all the students go to private tuition classes in Jaffna. The performance of the students in school examinations and public examinations like G.C.E (O/L) and G.C.E (A/L) examinations is very often discussed by parents with great eagerness and the loan words “*pa:su*” (Pass) and “*peil*” (Fail) are very widespread in the speech of Jaffna Tamil monolinguals.

In the play titled “*kiṭa:ṭayin Vətəna mara*” these loan words “*tiusan*” and “*pa:su*” used among some other loan words are used in a dialogue between two characters who are uneducated parents in the play (Sivapalan, Nov.2001, P. 54).

1.3 English Borrowing in Tamil Poetry

Example 1

In the poem titled “*Mukam*”, the loan word “*vasu*” (bus) appears. Although a Tamil translated form “*pe:tunttu*” is existing for the English word “*bus*”, the loan word “*vasu*” has been used to rhyme with the Tamil word “*va:sal*” that means the entrance in the preceding line in the poem. (Jesurasa,1984)

Example 2

In the poem titled “*Niskaamiya karmam*” the loan word ‘*surgery*’ is used instead of the Tamil translation ‘*satira sikicai*’. The word ‘*surgery*’ is more general in the usage of Jaffna Tamil, so that the poet used the English loan word “*surgery*” to provide the better understanding to the average public (Pathmanathan, 2005).

Example 3

Also, in the poem “*payanam*”, the English word ‘*pass*’ (clearance) is seen. The Tamil equivalent for the word ‘*pass*’ is ‘*anumatī*’ but, the poet used the loan word ‘*pass*’ due to its acquaintance to the ordinary people (Sivapalan, 2000).

Example 4

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The loan words ‘ka:r’(Car) ‘ro:tu’(Road) and ‘ta:r’ (Tar) have been used in the poem titled “kundu:si”. The lexis ‘ka:r’ and ‘ro:du’ are handled in the first and second lines to make a rhyme effect. Although the English word ‘Road’ has its Tamil equivalents ‘vi:ti’, ‘pa:tai’ and ‘sa:lai’, the word ‘ro:tu’ has been chosen to such Tamil equivalents, as this borrowing is normally used in day to day communication and all the lines in this poem imply casual tone. (Jesurasa, 1984, p.9)

Example 5

In the poem titled “Padaiyal”, the borrowings ‘keiku’ (Cake), ‘sæ:nvitʃu’(Sandwich) and ‘kʌdlætu’(Cutlet) have been chosen to form a deriding effect. The poem is planned to scorn the natives of Jaffna who make effort to adopt the foreign culture by entertaining hosts with foreign food items at conventional ceremonies (Sokalingam, 1982, P.IV).

1.4 English Borrowing in Tamil Fiction

Almost in all the works of fiction which have been produced by the Jaffna Tamil writers the presence of English borrowings is a prominent feature. Some examples of English borrowing that appear in short stories have been selected for discussion below. The English words of the borrowings are given within brackets against the borrowings.

Example 1

In a short story titled “Mella Tamil Ini”, the borrowings “ʃelipo:n pu:ʃ” (TelephoneBooth), “po:nko:l”(phone call) and “ala:tam”(Alarm) are seen. As the characters that use the loan words in the story are uneducated, these loan words are associated with them to maintain a natural style of conversation. As far as the word “Alarm” is concerned, its phonetically modified form “ala:tam” is generally used in Jaffna Tamil fiction. It could be noticed that though Tamil translated forms “ʃolaipeisi” and “ʃolaipeisi ʃalaidu” are available for telephone and phone call, the author of the story intends to introduce the loan words that are well-known to the normal reader through the characters. (Kandasamy, 1999).

Example 2

In the short story titled “Etʃankal”, the borrowings ‘telipo:n’(Telephone), ‘pæ;ku’ (Bag), ‘tikæt’ (Ticket) and ‘a:mika:tan’ (Army Soldier) have been used. The writer of this short story selected these borrowings to keep up a casual style as these borrowings very often take place in the ordinary speech of the people (Rani, 2001, P.04). Moreover, it is a normal feature in Tamil that the ending ‘ka:tan’ is inserted to male persons’ names of kinship or profession. Likewise, ‘ka:ti’ goes with females. For instance, one’s uncle is sometimes referred to as ‘ma:manka:tan’ and aunt is ‘ma:mika:ti’ in Tamil. The lexis such as ‘ma:man’ and ‘ma:mi’ refer to uncle and aunt respectively in Tamil.

Example 3

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The loan words such as ‘*ṭiyəṭar*’ (Theatre) and ‘*sinima:*’ (cinema) are among other loan words found in the short story titled ‘*Alaikal*’. The loan word ‘*ṭiyəṭar*’ is very often used by monolinguals to mean the cinema theatre and operation theatre depending on the context. Even though the word ‘Theatre’ has translations such as ‘*ṭirayarankam*’ and ‘*Paḍama:likai*’ in Tamil, they have been purposely avoided here. These two loan words appear in the conversation between two characters in the novel and the writer of the short story has employed these loan words, as the translated forms are usually in the literary form of writings (Kandasamy, 1999, p.18).

Example 4

The loan word ‘*ko:ras*’ has been employed in the novel titled ‘*Sa:nro:n Ena kə:ṭatai*’ to form a sense of humour. The context concerned in the novel is a class-room and the way by which the pupils greet their teacher together and melodically has been depicted, since they greet their teacher in chorus (Shanmugalingan, 1993, P.1).

1.5 The Emergence of a Group of New Anti-Purist Writers

One factor worked against the Tamil purist movement started by S. Vedachalampillai in Thanjavur district, India about the 1950s. In India as well as in Sri Lanka, due to post – Independence problems, conditions were created for the emergence of a group of writers who belonged to traditionally oppressed sections of Tamil society (Karunakaran, 2008) Many of them were impressed by Marxist – Communist ideals which provided them with a broad world view and also the confidence to express their thoughts and feeling freely, to struggle against oppression. Though their educational level was low, they ushered in new experiences, and visions into fiction, poetry and drama. They scorned “correct” Tamil taught at school and ignored pure Tamil (Kailasapathy, 1986, p. 21 cited in Karunakaran, 2008, p.134).

Elements such as regional and social dialectalisms, collquialisms, neologisms etc. which were considered to be incorrect or unacceptable in writings earlier, have become very vital to a writer nowadays, since these elements are used in communication. During the last two decades, modern Tamil writers waged incessant struggles to overcome language barriers and to use what they call ‘living language’ The modern Tamil writers in Sri Lanka during the course of the last two decades produced new variety of writings in which many novel features have been introduced. Since the writers became acquainted with new areas of social and personal experiences, and extended the range of portrayal of emotions and psychological state of characters, their linguistic scope too broadened. They attempted to produce works which could be read and understood by ordinary people. It was Subramaniya Bharathi (1882 - 1921), the greatest Tamil poet of the modern age in India who produced modernism in the preface to “*Paanchali Capatham*” (1910), he wrote:

“He who produces an epic in simple style and diction, easily understandable metres and popular tunes will be infusing a new life into our language. The meaning must be crystal clear even to the neo – literates; at the same time, the

poem must not be wanting in the graces and refinements that are expected of an epic” (Kailasapathy, 1986, p 43 cited in Karunakaran, 2008, p.135).

Many Sri Lankan modern writers followed the literary style of Subramania Bharathi. Novelists like Daniel, S. Ganeshalingam, S. Yoganathan, and Benedict Balan mentioned that only a few have utilized the day-to-day spoken Tamil of ordinary people in their creations.

What is pertinent in this context is the fact that many of the writers belong to the lower strata of society. Traditionally, they have been deprived of their rights of education and considered culturally backward. They introduced idioms that were fresh, plain and simple but capable of infusing a new life into our language (Karunakaran, 2008). These writers who have emerged from depressed castes tended to assume a leftist – Marxist orientation. This inclination toward Marxism is not necessarily intellectual attachment to the communist movement, because it provides them with a world – outlook, a well – knit fraternity and an important role in the backing they had from the communist movement that the writers use the spoken language in literature.

A new variety of poetry called “Puṭu kavīṭai” (New Poetry) is very popular in Jaffna nowadays. The following remarks by Kailasapathy on New Poetry are notable.

“Perhaps the one single important feature of the ‘new poetry’ is psychologicism. The individualized inner experiences of the poets find their expressions in their (often fragmentary) poems. What sometimes jars or disconcerts readers (who are unilingual) of these poems is their betrayal of the world. These poets also have a weakness for using English words, often unwarranted in their poems”... (1986, p. 47 cited in Karunakaran, 2008,p.136).

It is quite evident from the above remarks that English words probably English borrowings are used in poetry in the present day. In the view of Kailasapathy, the use of English words in poems shows the weakness of poets. He seems to hold this view because he is an admirer of traditional poetry and he himself admitted it when he commented thus. “I myself do not approve of everything said and done under the banner new poetry. Personally I prefer rhyme and metre, and I have expressed my penchant for them in my Critical writings” (1986, p.46 cited in Karunakaran, 2008,p.136).

As a curious phenomenon, westernization is more evident in recent Tamil writings in Jaffna. It is curious because one may have expected that with gradual decline of English education in Sri Lanka and the increasing use of national languages for official purposes, a more inward literary climate would emerge. Such tendencies of westernization should be considered in terms of problems connected with emigration, brain – drain etc. The reference to foreign countries and foreign practice in the Tamil fiction is but another aspect of the emigratory inclinations of certain sections of people in the society. There is a real connection between certain ideas about literature and the role of the writer and social factors (Karunakaran, 2008 & Suntharesan, 2003).

1.6 Western Influence in Tamil Writings

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The modern writers introduced new genres and experimented with western literary modes. They focused on a new literary language which could bridge the divisions that existed between the traditional literature and western, mainly English influences. Because English influences became to dominate over the experiences and way of life of the natives, they attempted to create a literary language to express their experiences of the changing trend of social and intellectual world. Their works of course reached out to the large middle –class reading public. The growing awareness of the socialist atmosphere of the sixties made literature to seriously focus on social and political issues. In today’s context, social relevance is the most important issue. Almost, all literary works whether poetry, fiction or drama concern themselves with political and social issues (Obeyesekera, 1981, p. 57 cited in Karunakaran, 2008,p.137-138). The writers of the early 20th century were concerned with social issues, but the people in that period did not bother much about social issues. But, today both creative writers and the public are concerned with social and political issues.

As far as the modern Tamil writings are concerned, the replacement of words and phrases which were quite unfamiliar to the average reader, by plain and ordinary words and phrases including English borrowings which have become very vital elements of the day – to day expression of the public is skillfully carried out by writers. This feature of the modern Tamil literature in fact makes the message to be conveyed through such writings sound and forceful.

1.7 English Borrowing in the Tamil Lexicon

Some of the English borrowings found in Indian Tamil and Sri Lankan Tamil have been included in the Tamil lexicon titled “Kriyāvin Tarkala Tamil Akarati” (Subramaniam, 1992 cited in Karunakaran, 2008,p.138- 142) (See List A).

The Prominent feature of the borrowings found in this lexicon is their total assimilation into Tamil. For example, the English word *court* has become a borrowing in its assimilated form as “ko:tu” in the Sri Lankan Tamil. Similarly, words like “Hurricane”, “Cholera” and “Receipt” are borrowings in their assimilated forms as “atikan”, “ka:lata” and “rasi:tu” respectively, both in the Indian and Sri Lankan Tamil. Since the borrowings found in this lexicon are vastly and very frequently used by both monolinguals and bilinguals, they have been totally assimilated.

Among the borrowings incorporated in the lexicon, three are indicated as Sri Lankan borrowings. Of these three, except the borrowing “ko:tu” (Law court), the other two borrowings. “tei (tea) and “la:mpu” are found in their hybridized forms as “teitanni:r” (a drink of tea) and “la:mpennai” (kerosene oil) respectively.

Though only three of the borrowings are indicated as usages in Sri Lanka, all the English borrowings found in this lexicon are borrowings in Sri Lanka also.

LIST A

English Borrowings in “ Kriyāvin tarkala tamil Akarati”

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| <u>Borrowings</u> | <u>English</u> |
|------------------------------|----------------|
| 1. atikan | Hurricane |
| 2. aluminiam | Aluminium |
| 3. a:men | Amen |
| 4. isla:m | Islam |
| 5. uyil | Will |
| 6. o:tu | Vote |
| 7. Kaṭ ṭo:liklam | Catholicism |
| 8. ka:pi | Coffee |
| 9. ka:mpavun ṭu | Compound |
| 10. ka:lani | Colony |
| 11. ka:lata: | Cholera |
| 12. kiritavam | Christianity |
| 13. kiristu | Christ |
| 14. ko:tu (Sri Lankan usage) | Court |
| 15. caṭ ni | Chutney |
| 16. carpaṭ | Sherbet |
| 17. calu:n | Saloon |
| 18. Cinima: | Cinema |
| 19. cent | Scent |
| 20. Caiki ḷ | Cycle |
| 21. co:ṭa: | Soda |
| 22. ṭam ḷar | Tumbler |
| 23. ṭad ₃ an | Dozen |
| 24. ṭa:ktar | Doctor. |
| 25. ṭa:lar | Dollar |
| 26. ṭitaunu | Trunk |
| 27. ṭin | Tin |
| 28. tita:yar | Drawer |
| 29. ti: | Tea |
| 30. ṭi:tḷar | Teacher |
| 31. ṭu:b | Dupe |
| 32. ṭa:r | Tar |
| 33. tei (Sri Lankan usage) | Tea |
| 34. putatam | Protein |
| 35. pu:rva: | Bourgeois |
| 36. paipiḷ | Bible |
| 37. poṭ ṭa:n | Button |
| 38. po:li:s | Police |
| 39. ma:rksiam | Marxism |
| 40. mayil | Mile |
| 41. mainar | Minor |
| 42. rasi:ṭu | Receipt |

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| | | |
|-----|---------------------------|------------|
| 43. | rapp̄ar | Rubber |
| 44. | rayil | Rail |
| 45. | ro:sa: | Rose |
| 46. | ravuṭṭi | Rowdy |
| 47. | la:nṭar | Lantern |
| 48. | la:mpu (Sri Lankan usage) | Lamp |
| 49. | Vanki | Bank |
| 50. | ha:l | Hall |
| 51. | ho:mio:paṭi | Homeopathy |

1.8 Conclusion

Modern literature in Tamil produced by Jaffna writers contain English borrowings amply, as the modern age witnesses the advent of new concepts of different branches of knowledge and the introduction of new articles because of huge progress in science, technology, trade , communication etc., at the global level. The progress in these fields have caused a kind of remarkable, revolutionary change in the life style of people which in turn has modified the creative thinking as well as the style of analysis.

English borrowings in the Tamil literature enhances the contents of literature by providing it with new dimensions that might appeal to the minds of the reader and serve as a tool to pass on ideas with salient effects. In fact, the modern literary works in Tamil produced by Jaffna authors would be a documentary proof for the effect of English loan words in the communication of Jaffna Tamils.

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