

### Assignment 3

Name: Harinie Sivaramasethu

Roll Number: 2021114008

Language: Tamil

This assignment shall dwell deeper onto the following topics:

1. [What is Diglossia?](#)
  2. [Tamil Diglossia](#)
  3. [Bangla Diglossia](#)
  4. [Sinhalese Diglossia](#)
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#### ***What is Diglossia?***

Diglossia is a linguistic variation where a language has two different varieties, of which one is high or formal or literary and the other is low or informal or colloquial speech which may be diverse.

Diglossia is defined by Ferguson as “a relatively stable language situation in which, in addition to the primary dialects of the language (which may include a standard or regional standard), there is a very divergent highly codified (often more grammatically complex) superposed variety which is the vehicle of a large and respected body of written literature, either of an earlier period or of another speech community. It is learned largely by formal education and is used for most written and formal spoken purposes but is not used by any other sector of the community for ordinary conversation”. (Ferguson)

The ‘diglossia’ refers to a situation where two or more varieties are used for intra-societal communication. When there are many distinct codes in a society, the serving function of one code are dependent on the functions of the other code. These two sets of behaviours, attitudes and values of the codes are fully accepted culturally as legitimate and complementary. They are called as High Variety/ Language (HV) or Low Variety/ Language (LV). (Fishman)

In case of HV of a diglossic situation, it is not restricted to a particular region or community. Instead, the high variety is learnt and used by all people of a speech community. The standard spoken language which is used in the non-diglossic situation is also uniform throughout the speech community as the formal variety of the diglossic situation. However, these situations are different in the sense that the formal variety of a diglossic situation has socially determined domain of function and the standard dialect, not necessarily, has a restricted function. (M. W. Silva)

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#### ***Tamil Diglossia***

Under this topic, we shall elaborate upon the following topics

1. [Diglossia existence from the past](#)
2. [Examples observed in the past](#)
3. [True diglossia proof](#)

#### **Diglossia existence from the past**

It is possible to trace the existence of variation in Tamil from the earliest period in the history of Tamil. The historical evidence does not give a clear idea whether there was diglossia in Tamil or not, but it is possible to come to a conclusion on the basis of available evidence, that Tamil had two different styles, namely literary style and colloquial style from the earliest period.

For example, the earliest grammatical work in Tamil, Tolkappiam mentions the terms **varakku** 'colloquial language' and **ceyyul** 'literary language' and also mentions the parts of the Tamil country where the speech was closer to the literary language and the parts of the Tamil country where the speech was deviant from the literary language.

The terms, such as **centamir natu** 'the country of standard Tamil' and **kotuntamir natu** 'the country of deviant Tamil' show the existence of more than one style in the use of Tamil even two thousand years ago (Sethupillai, 1974).

Tamil thus has two varieties, the classical and the colloquial, or the ancient and the modern, and they are called '**Cen-Tamir**' (the word cemai means perfect/good) and '**Kodun-Tamir**' or '**Pechu-Tamir**' (which literally translates to spoken-tamil) respectively which differ one from the other so widely that they might be considered different languages (Caldwell, 1974).

The terms colloquial, spoken, modern, Kodun-Tamil, Pechu-Tamil, Low variety and Informal Tamil are used interchangeably and indicate a singular form, while the terms literary, Cen-Tamil, ancient, High variety and Formal Tamil are used to indicate the other.

#### **Examples (Differences) observed in the past:**

Some of the phonological mergers, such as /y/ and /l/ N into /l/ in colloquial Tamil are found in the eighth century inscriptions. This change of /y/ to /c/ as in '**uyir**' > '**ucir**' ('life') and the loss of /r/ as in '**pa:rkka**' > '**pa:kka**' ('to see') shows the existence of colloquial Tamil since these phonological changes were not allowed in literary Tamil.

The following illustrations from inscriptions of eighth and ninth centuries A.D. (Zvelebil, 1964) assert the existence of colloquial Tamil. The forms to the left are **literary** and the forms to the right are **colloquial** as found in inscriptions:

CenTamil (Formal)	PechuTamil (Informal)	Meaning
ellai	elle	Boundary
aintu	ancu	Five
vaitta	vacca	Having put
kal	kallu	Stone
Ko:no:lai	konole	Order of the king

#### **True diglossia proof:**

Ferguson claimed that there are eight features which would determine if there exists a diglossic situation in hand, namely, function, prestige, literary heritage, acquisition, standardization, stability, grammar and lexicon. Let us look at all of these individually.

#### **1. Function**

	High V	Low V
Sermon in church or mosque	+	
Instructions to servants, waiters, workmen, clerks		+
Personal letter	+	
Speech in parliament, political speech	+	
University lecture	+	
Conversation with family, friends, colleagues		+
News broadcast	+	
News editorial, news story, caption on picture	+	

caption on political cartoon	+	+
Poetry	+	
Folk Literature		+

For the situation, sermon in Church or Mosque, Temple situation also may be taken for Tamil. In most of the temples in Tamilnadu, songs from the devotional literatures, like Thiruva:cakam, Thiruppukar and Thiruvirutpa: are being sung. During the month of Markari (December-January) songs from Thiruppa:vai and Thiruvempa:vai will be sung.

Though poetry is written in literary Tamil, the folk songs are in Low variety. When the proverbs are used in the literatures, they are written in High variety (Perumal, 1989). The captions on political cartoons may be written both in High and Low variety.

## **2. Prestige**

The high variety is considered to be high or superior due to its long literary heritage, standardization and its perfection in its usage. The language which is learnt through proper schooling may become more perfect compared to the low variety which is acquired in the natural situation. The high variety has developed prestige due to its use in the religious literature and religious functions.

## **3. Literary heritage**

Tamil has a long literary tradition which goes back to more than two thousand years. The Sangam literatures and the Middle Tamil period's bhakti literatures are held in high esteem by all the Tamil speakers.

The language of modern Tamil, though it looks different from the language of the Sangam literatures, is the continuation from one stage to another. It is claimed that the literary variety of Tamil is more conservative compared to other classical languages of the world, in the sense that though the body of the literature represents a long-time span, there are no differences between the earlier language and the present-day Tamil.

This may be seen here as observed by Zvelebil (1968) and quoted by Shanmugam (1980): "the phonology and the morphology of modern literary Tamil is in the basic outlines and structural principles identical with the norm set up in the 3rd - 2nd century B.C. Hence, the often-repeated statement that Tamil is remarkably conservative that it has preserved its identity through the ages that it has changed very little or not at all. This statement is quite true, very true even as far as the standard literary style of the language is concerned". (Zvelebil) (James) (Shanmugam)

## **4. Acquisition**

The local dialect which is one of the varieties of low variety is acquired by the children. So, one of the varieties of low variety will be the vernacular of the children. The children will speak in that variety to the adults.

The children may hear the High variety if they are among educated people or if their parents are educated, otherwise they will hear only the low variety. They need formal schooling to learn the high variety of Tamil.

## **5. Standardization**

High variety has long grammatical tradition as it has long literary tradition from Tolka:ppiyam which is the earliest work available in Tamil. There are other traditional grammars like Ya:pparunkalavirutti of the tenth century, Vi:raco:riyam of the eleventh century and Nannal of the thirteenth century. All these grammars are written in verses using high Tamil. (Meenakshisundaram)

Regarding the specialization of the function of high and low varieties, there is no overlapping. However, there are few exceptions, such as writing low variety words in personal letters. This situation may be like novels where conversation is used in dialogues whereas the narration is in high variety.

## 6. Stability

There is evidence to show that there was difference between spoken and written Tamil in the past (see section 2 under Tamil diglossia), but there is no evidence to claim that Tamil had diglossia in the past. However, we do have to note that the concept of diglossia is also of recent origin.

## 7. Grammar

There are striking differences between high and low varieties in phonology, morphology and syntax.

### • Phonology

Eg) The words, in high variety which ends in a lateral /l/ or /ɭ/ or glide /y/ do not have them in low variety in certain environments.

High variety	Low variety	Meaning
aval	ava	She
vanda:l	vanda:	She came
conna:l	conna:	If someone says
po:na:l	po:na:	If someone goes
ma:ŋga:y	ma:ŋga:	Mango
te:ŋga:y	te:ŋga:	coconut

Eg) Monosyllabic words with short vowel in high variety, which end in nasal or lateral, end in nasal or lateral germination with /u/ in low variety.

High variety	Low variety	Meaning
Tin	Tinnu	To eat
kal	Kallu	Stone
kaṇ	kaṇṇu	Eye
pal	Pallu	Tooth
col	Collu	Word
eṇ	eṇṇu	number

Eg) The words which have /tt/ in high variety, have /cc/ in low variety after a front vowel as shown in the examples.

High variety	Low variety	Meaning
viritta:n	viricca:n	He opened
siritta:n	siricca:n	He laughed
piritta:n	piricca:n	He separated
kiritta:n	kiricca:n	He tore

### • Morphology

High variety	Low variety	Meaning
Neengal therai padithirku sendrikala?	Neenga paduthuku ponigala?	Did you go to movie?
Avan uraingi vittan	Avan thungitan	He slept.
Avan padasalaiku sendrivittan	Avan palliku poivittan	He went to school.

## 8. Lexicon

There are no two sets of lexical items for high and low varieties separately to claim that Tamil situation is diglossic. The words which occur in low variety occur in high variety also. Thus, contrary to one of the defining characteristic features of diglossia given by Ferguson (1984) as there are not many doublets of lexical items one of which is exclusively used in high variety and the other in low variety. (Ferguson)

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### ***Bangla Diglossia***

The present-day Bengali language situation may be stated as

1. The presence of regional dialects,
2. The Calit Bhasa (current language) which is based on the formal spoken and written varieties has gained the status of standard colloquial.
3. The literary language consists of two varieties: one is Sadhu Bhasa (pedantic language) and the other is colloquial standard which may be equated with Calit Bhasa. (Chatterjee)

Sadhu Bhasa is high variety and Calit Bhasa is low variety.

High variety – Sadhu bhasa	Low variety – calit bhasa
jaibo	jabo
giyachilo	gechilo
bohichhe	boichhe
gahitechhe	gaichhe
poritechhe	porchhe
maritechhe	marchhe
bandhitechhe	bandhchhe

Sadhu Bhasa is based on the vernacular literatures of Bengali which were in the form of poetic compositions using different dialects. Later, the Sadhu Bhasa grew using a large number of Sanskrit elements.

This trend was changed and the spoken form of Bengali was introduced for formal speaking and writing. However, the bulk of vocabulary, grammatical derivation and compounding are from Sanskrit. So, the standard colloquial is nothing but the Sadhu Bhasa. (Chatterjee)

Though Sadhu Bhasa variety of Bengali is losing ground, it is still used in compilation of some text books for schools, and colleges and in writing books on philosophy and law. It is also used in invitation cards for traditional rituals and ceremonies and for writing editorials by some newspapers. (Chatterjee)

Sadhu Bhasa and Calit Bhasa are functionally different. They are used in two different sets of situations.

Sadhu Bhasa is used in public address of all sorts, scripted speech, news broadcast, news journals, creative literature except novels, dramas and short stories, narrative description in novels and short stories, formal letters, and class lectures. Calit Bhasa or Low Calit Bhasa is used in dialogues in novels and dramas, informal personal letters, conversation with family members and to give instructions to workman, servants, and subordinates. (Chatterjee)

Structurally Sadhu Bhasa is different from Calit Bhasa and these two varieties have socially determined functional domains. The educated Bengali speakers could understand both standard

colloquial and Sadhu Bhasa without any problem. Those who could control only standard colloquial Bengali cannot understand and speak effectively the Sadhu Bhasa.

### ***Sinhalese Diglossia***

Spoken Sinhala, the variety used by Sinhala speakers for everyday conversation, is the L variety. Literary Sinhala, the variety used for most written communication, is the H variety. Gair (1968, 1986) describes Sinhala diglossia in terms of Ferguson's nine defining characteristics (or "rubrics", Fasold 1984). Let us explore them further: (Gair)

#### **1. Function**

The only discrepancies occur in four functions: sermons, university lectures, political speeches, and personal letters, the first three of which can be characterized as formal speaking situations.

*Table 1. Distribution of functions in Sinhala diglossia (source: Gair 1986)*

<i>Function</i>	<i>Sinhala Variety</i>	<i>Predicted Variety</i>
Instructions to servants, waiters, workmen, clerks	Spoken	L
Conversation with family, friends, colleagues	Spoken	L
Radio "soap opera"	Spoken	L
Caption on political cartoon	Spoken	L
Folk literature	Spoken	L
Sermon in church, mosque, temple	Spoken (formal)	H
University lecture	Spoken (formal)	H
Speech in parliament, political speech	Spoken (formal)	H
	(or Literary) <sup>1</sup>	
Personal letter	Spoken (formal)	H
	(or Literary)	
Novels (conversational parts)	Spoken	*
(non-conversational parts)	Literary	*
News broadcast	Literary	H
Newspaper editorial, news story, picture caption	Literary	H
Poetry	Literary	H
Government documents, forms	Literary	*
Airline announcements	Literary	*

\* = not in Ferguson (1959)

#### **2. Prestige, literary heritage, acquisition, and standardization**

-Literary Sinhala is the prestige variety of Sinhala, and it has a broad body of literature threading back centuries. However, there is no known literature in Spoken Sinhala.

- Literary variety is acquired only through formal education, while the only vehicle for learning Spoken Sinhala is through a naturalistic acquisition.

-Literary variety appears to be more standardized than the Spoken.

#### **3. Stability**

According to Gair (1986), the stability of Sinhala diglossia can be explained by the relative absence of various "diglossia-threatening factors". (Gair)

#### **4. Grammar**

Eg) According to Gair, the principal structural distinction between Literary and Spoken Sinhala is that Literary has subject-verb agreement on finite verbs while Spoken has none.

Eg) Verb morphology is complex. In Literary Sinhalese, verbs are inflected for person, number, and to a lesser degree, gender. In colloquial Sinhalese person, number and gender are not formally indicated.

Literary:	<u>kapami</u>	'I cut'
	<u>kapamu</u>	'we cut'
	<u>kapahi</u>	'you (sg) cut'
	[ <u>kapahu</u>	'you (pl) cut']
	<u>kapayi</u>	'he/she cuts'
	<u>kapanneeya</u>	'he cuts'
	<u>kapanniiya</u>	'she cuts'
	<u>kapati</u>	'they cut'
	<u>kapannooya</u>	
but, Colloquial:	<u>kap<u>newa</u></u>	'I/we/you (sg;pl)/he/she/they cut(s)

(M. S. Silva)

## 5. Lexicon

- De Silva concludes that the principal differences between Literary and Colloquial are lexical in nature, and that the grammatical properties of Literary are “redundancies”.

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