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Standardization or restandardization: The case for "Standard" Spoken Tamil

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ABSTRACT

The Tamil language has had its current standard written form since the 13th century; but because of increasing diglossia, spoken Tamil dialects have now diverged so radically from earlier norms, including the written standard (LT, or Literary Tamil) that no spoken dialect, regional or social, can function as the koiné or lingua franca. Because LT is never used for authentic informal oral communication between live speakers, there has always been a need for some sort of spoken "standard" koiné for inter-dialect communication. Aside from interpersonal communication, one hears this inter-dialect koiné most clearly in the so-called "social" film, which arose out of its antecedent, the popular or "social" drama. Conversational portions of novels and short stories also exhibit spoken forms, though not always as clearly "phonetic" as a phonetician might expect. The goal of this paper is to examine the concept of "language standardization" as it has been applied to other languages, focusing on the role of literacy and writing in this process; then to present evidence for, as well as the sources of, koinéization of "Standard Spoken Tamil"; and then to determine whether SST is in fact an emergent standard, given the challenges of literacy and writing. (Standardization, Tamil, diglossia, linguae francae, koinés)*

The Tamil language has the second-longest history of standardization in South Asia, having been codified by Tolkāppiyanār in the early centuries of the Common Era. It has changed radically over time, and subsequent standard written forms have evolved, the most recent being the codification by the grammarian Pavanandi in the 13th century. Because of increasing diglossia, spoken Tamil dialects have now diverged so radically from one another, and from the written standard (LT, or Literary Tamil), that there are problems of mutual intelligibility between many Tamil dialects.[1] I will not even begin here to deal with the lack of intelligibility between Indian Tamil and the extremely divergent Sri Lanka Tamil dialects.[2] Because LT is never used for informal oral communication between live speakers,[3] some sort of spoken koiné has filled this gap and has been in use for centuries, though it is not always clear retrospectively what the linguistic

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features of this koiné have been.[4] The Brahman dialect of Tamil was once the koiné used for inter-caste and inter-regional communication, but in the 20th century it has been replaced by another, non-Brahman dialect. The domain most clearly dominated by this koiné is the so-called "social" film, which arose out of another domain, the popular or "social" drama. Conversational portions of novels and short stories also exhibit spoken language forms, though these are not always as clearly representative of the non-Brahman koiné as a phonetician might expect.[5] The goals of this paper are to examine the concept of "language standardization" as it has been applied to other languages, to examine the conditions under which a fairly uniform "standard" Spoken Tamil (SST) evolved, to present evidence for standardization features of SST, and to determine whether SST is in fact an emergent standard.

For a review of the rather extensive literature on the question of the existence of a Standard Spoken Tamil, see Bloch 1910, Pillai 1960, Andronov 1962, 1975, Schiffman 1979, Asher 1982, and Britto 1986. Various studies by Zvelebil (e.g. 1959–63) depict a range of dialect variation among the modern, non-standard, essentially regional varieties of Tamil.

During a recent research visit in Singapore, I was often asked whether there is such a thing as Standard Spoken Tamil – and if so, what its main features might be, and how Singapore Spoken Tamil would compare with it. Because I have actually spent a significant part of my academic career investigating the question of SST, and I have evidence that in fact such a thing exists, I am addressing the issue directly in this paper. My belief that SST exists is bolstered by my data from Singapore – where, if anything, a wider use of SST koiné is evident than is general in India.[6]

SST, as I and others believe it to exist, is based on the everyday speech of educated non-Brahman Tamils. Its most obvious public domain, as noted above, is Tamil films of the so-called "social" type, other modern "social" stage dramas, some radio broadcasting (radio plays etc.), and to some extent television.[7] This language is not the same as any regional or social variety of Tamil, such as the Trichy-Tanjore Non-Brahman, Mysore Brahman, or Ramnad Adi-Dravida varieties. In many ways it is closer to literary Tamil, though nowhere near identical to it. There is some variation in it, but natural languages are variable; and given the absolute lack of formal standardizing pressures put on SST (it is subject to no academy, no school system, and no literary society's strictures), it is remarkably uniform.[8] It is spoken by educated people of various castes and regions to one another; people learn it by listening to the dialog in plays and films, and by working on communicating with one another in college hostels and other places where educated people come together and try to communicate in Tamil. Of course, it is used mostly for informal purposes, but one also hears it used by educated people for certain high-register purposes, where LT has no functional register. For example, Tamil linguists trained in Western linguistics often begin a discussion in English and gradually code-switch into Tamil with English loans. I have

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heard entire university-level lectures on Tamil syntax presented in this way, with sentences like this:

> *inda* POSITION-*le oru* MORPHEME BOUNDARY ADMIT-*paṇṇaa, appram onga* MORPHOPHONEMIC RULES-*um* CONSTITUENT STRUCTURE-*um* AFFECTED-*aa irukkum.*
>
> "If we admit a morpheme boundary in this position, then your morphophonemic rules and your constituent structure will both be affected."

Many teachers, moreover, whether they teach in Literary Tamil or in English, use SST to paraphrase what they say, because students otherwise will not always understand them. In Singapore schools that I have visited, Tamil classes are regularly conducted with SST as the language of "explanation" (in fact, the MEDIUM of instruction), though SST is never the OBJECT of instruction. The assumption is that students actually understand SST, which may not always be the case in Singapore; and this complicates the pedagogical problematicity of this issue. In Tamil schools of India, children already speak some kind of spoken Tamil from their home environment, though it is rarely the "standard" koiné. How students "acquire" standardized ST is a question that has not been examined or reported on except anecdotally. Most teachers do not recognize the extent to which they actually use SST in school settings, and there is no prevalent notion that some forms of it might be more acceptable than others. That is, teachers do not "correct" children for "erroneous" use of spoken Tamil because they possess no overt knowledge of what that might be. In fact, children probably acquire a regional koiné in elementary school, and then acquire the kind of SST forms I am examining when they come to live in college hostels (dormitories) as young adults.

THE ROLE OF LITERACY IN STANDARDIZATION

Another prickly issue is that of the role of writing in the development and transmission of great traditions. For years the existence of orally transmitted bodies of literature in the Indian subcontinent has vexed Westerners (though not South Asians) because it appears that ancient Indic texts were codified and transmitted without overt evidence that writing was involved. By "writing," I (and others) mean specifically marks made on paper, leather, clay, stone, wood, palm leaves, or other materials, using styli, pens, or other markers, such that a visible record, however perishable, is left. Western scholars like Goody 1987 have taken the position that codification and transmission of such great works as the Vedas simply could not have been possible without writing; so evidence to the contrary, such as the elaborate and complicated systems of memorization observable in traditional Sanskritic colleges, has been dismissed. I have discussed this issue in a recent work (Schiffman 1996:171–72), and I must concur with Staal (1986:27) that the Goody hypothesis is contradicted by the Indic evidence.

What may be the problematic issue here is that Goody and others make a distinction between writing/literacy on the one hand, and orality on the other – whereas the real distinction may be between writing (marks on surfaces) on the

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one hand, and literacy (including oral literacy) on the other.[9] Whatever we may conclude, it seems that, in India, what was thought to be necessary for standardization or for invariant rule-observation to occur, was that it be CODIFIED, i.e. that eventually the "grammar" should be recorded, in sutra format, and memorized. In modern times these grammars have also been written down, and they are now found in "books." The notion that a language might be codified without having been committed to memory in sutras is not a prevalent one, or perhaps even an acceptable one, in modern India; but the fact that a grammar may not in fact be written (i.e. marked on surfaces) is an ancient and acceptable state of affairs. In the case of Tamil, for example, the idea is that the grammatical rules existed a-priori and were taught to the Vedic sage Agastya by Murukan, the son of the god Śiva, who then taught "divine Tamil" to his disciples (Schiffman 1996:175). This accords nicely with the modern linguistic notion that structure is IN the language and must be discovered by the linguist (though the idea that Murukan might have some new ideas about SST, and would want us all to rethink his earlier lessons, is not so likely).

DEFINITIONS OF STANDARDIZATION

When the question arises as to whether whether SST is standardized, we must have an idea of what constitutes a general definition of standard language – or failing that, what constitutes standardization in a particular language. We have evidence in many languages of both (a) conscious, planned standardization (via language academies, dictionary-writers, printers, and proofreaders), and of (b) the somewhat haphazard choice of a particular dialect of some city or ruler (Madrid, Paris) and standardization via use in official texts (the Bible, the Quran etc.), followed perhaps by royal fiat. (Thus the *Ordonnance de Villers-Cotterêt*, promulgated by the French king François I in 1539, established that only the French language should be used for record-keeping throughout France.)

Because the crux of the question is whether ironclad definitions of standardization exist, and whether SST meets those conditions – i.e. is standardized, or perhaps on the way to being standardized (some writers refer to "emergent" standards) – we need to review some working definitions of what standardization might entail. The best recent review of this issue is probably Joseph 1987, though his treatments focus either on well-known Western languages (English, French) or on non-literary languages such as Iñupiaq/Inuit. The kinds of problems that face non-Western but long-standardized languages, such as those of India or other parts of Asia, have not been the focus of Joseph's work, nor in fact of most work on the subject. Acutely diglossic languages like Tamil and Arabic perhaps constitute a completely different kind of case, in which RESTANDARDIZATION (Joseph 1987:174) seems to be what is happening; i.e., a newer version of the language, with its own spoken form, is emerging to challenge and attempt to capture some of the domains of an older, highly prestigious literary language that

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has ceased to be a vehicle of oral communication. As Joseph points out, however, restandardization will never totally replace the older standard language (LT); the older norm will simply be elevated to a "classical" status that it will continue to inhabit, but no one will try to emulate it except for a few archaizing diehard purists – or, in the case of liturgical languages, priests and pundits.[10]

Some useful early work on the issue of standardization emerged from the Prague School of linguistics, and this has been summarized by Garvin 1964; his key concepts are URBANIZATION, FLEXIBLE STABILITY, and INTELLECTUALIZATION. Many definitions of standardization (codification etc.) involve OFFICIAL choices being made about the corpus of a language; but as we will see in detail below, we are talking about the development of a SPOKEN standard, which may involve other kinds of decision-making.[11] Arabic, also acutely diglossic, is faced with a need to develop a koiné dialect that would be usable throughout the Arab world but would be closer to spoken dialects than classical Arabic. The result so far is the emergence of so-called MSA (Modern Standard Arabic), the features of which can be readily described (it is even what is taught to foreigners); but it is still in the process of evolution (Mitchell 1985, 1986, Walters 1996). In another study, Jernudd and Ibrahim put it like this:

> A new system of Arabic language varieties is developing which includes the emergence of a new international koiné which is rapidly overtaking classical language prescriptivism and which is compatible with emerging national or subregional dialects of what will remain one Arabic. Within each nationally controlled educational system, the massive growth in educational participation by people from all walks of life, and the penetration of mass media of multiple linguistic origins into all homes, together draw on an inevitable medley of vernacular and grammatical sources, from the highly deliberate to the necessarily unconscious, to bring about stylistic differentiation of Arabic to suit today's communicative needs. A strong force in this restructuring of the Arabic language system is cross-communal, fed by intense exchange of people, goods, messages, and ideas – and simply intent – between all Arabic language communities, toward a higher degree of mutual accommodation. (1986:6)

The main problem about comparisons with MSA, and indeed the whole dynamic of its evolution, is that it is not used as a spoken language by native speakers of Arabic, though they do write it and use some variety of it in, e.g., schools. Foreigners who learn it (as in university settings) subsequently have to learn a local spoken variety such as Cairene or Lebanese colloquial.

Status planning and corpus planning

Although a distinction is often made between status planning and corpus planning,[12] in fact corpus planning may also be viewed as a collection of decisions about the status of individual elements of the corpus of the language: This pronunciation is preferred over that; this spelling is correct and that is not; this plural-

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marker or past-tense form is preferred over that; this syntactic construction is "valorized" and that is "stigmatized." When all these status decisions have been made,[13] the corpus has been "standardized." It may then be disseminated through printing (the Bible, the Quran), through its use in royal or other administrative edicts (Charlemagne's grandsons' Strasbourg Oaths, the edicts of Aśoka) or nowadays, as the form of language taught in schools (Malaysia, Norway). The set of decisions may sometimes be summarized in the form of a (prescriptive) grammar.[14] As Garvin 1964 points out, decisions about standardization may get made, and perhaps even published, but dissemination of the results may fail; i.e., the standard may FAIL TO BE IMPLEMENTED, and implementation may in fact be the Achilles heel of most language planning. Garvin's requirement of flexible stability means that there should be some stability, usually through printing of a dictionary, spelling book, or reference grammar. But it must also be flexible, allowing for eventual revisions, addition of vocabulary, and adaptation to more modern technology. Garvin also posited four functions of a standard language:

(a) The unifying, i.e. the ability to unite several dialect areas into a single standard-language community. This function is largely SYMBOLIC, since it gives subjective value to notions of what kind of linguistic community the speakers inhabit. For Tamil, this is in general not a problem, because SST is accepted and spoken widely in Malaysia and Singapore as well as in Tamil Nadu.[15]

(b) The separatist, whose function is to set the group off from others, and establish boundaries. Again, this is largely SYMBOLIC. Tamil is already recognized as a literary language separate from its neighbors Telugu, Kannada, and Malayalam; hence the problem of deciding what is or is not Tamil does not arise.

(c) The prestige function, i.e. the prestige of possessing a standard language. This function is also largely SYMBOLIC, in that it has abstract meaning for the speakers; it gives them pride in the ability of their language to "hold its own" among other written languages. Tamil already has a prestigious literary language; this is thus not an issue here. Rather, capturing some of the prestige for the spoken language is a problem.

(d) The frame-of-reference function, which Garvin refers to as providing OBJECTIVITY. This is the ability to serve as a frame of reference or an objective standard for correctness, and for the perception and evaluation of poetic speech. As far as this affects Spoken Tamil, one needs an objective standard for what would or not be considered "correct"; but it is not necessary for poetry because the older norms dominate that domain.

Some of these functions apply to the development of SST and some do not; because Tamil already has a written standard (LT), some of these will not apply unless SST captures domains currently dominated by LT. It must also be noted that LT is not a unitary norm; there are many varieties of LT, some extremely conservative or archaizing. However, because Tamil culture conceives of the language as a single entity rather than multiple stages or varieties, taking refuge

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in the archaic style is often the strongest defense of recalcitrant resisters of modernization: They can easily demonstrate how modern spoken forms are totally inappropriate for something like religious usage.[16]

Other definitions of standardization

It may be useful to review some other attempts to define language standardization; as I have tried to indicate, much of the debate on this issue has to do more with English or other Western language, and may not be germane for Tamil or Arabic.

(a) Pakir 1994 discusses what she calls "unplanned language planning" or "invisible" language policies.

(b) Kachru 1985 proposes four types of codification:

(i) Authoritative or mandated (by academies etc.).

(ii) Sociological or attitudinal codification: social and attitudinal preference for certain varieties, accents.

(iii) Educational codification: dictionaries, media, teacher training, standardization of textbooks, school grammars etc.

(iv) Psychological codification: constraints on, e.g., Sanskrit.

(c) Milroy & Milroy 1985 state: "In the strictest sense, no spoken language can ever be fully standardized." Writing and spelling are easily standardized; but spoken standardization is an "ideology" – an idea, not a reality. If languages were not standardized, they would break up into regional spoken dialects and end in mutual unintelligibility.

(d) Haugen 1972 proposes that linguistic cultures are "intolerant" of optional variability in language. There must be selection, diffusion, maintenance, and elaboration of function.

(e) Joseph 1987 is mainly useful for showing how one highly standardized language, French, managed to rise from the position of an L variety to that of an H variety – displacing Latin, the previous H variety. In doing so, it had to prove that French had classical features as valid as those of Latin and Greek; once French had done this, other European languages were able to follow suit and expel Latin from H-status, e.g. in university education.

The Milroy & Milroy hypothesis that there is a Standard Language Ideology (SLI) seems to be predicated on the notion that all languages are in the same kind of sociolinguistic situation and go through the same stages of standardization. This is surely an unexamined and unprovable hypothesis, but it serves the belief that standardization not only cannot be shown to exist (i.e. standardization is a figment of someone's imagination, a mere social construct), but also that the ideology fostering standardization is hegemonistic, imperialistic, and hurtful. Not much evidence is given for the universal application of these claims.[17]

Since the SLI is an unproven hypothesis, we may treat it as itself an ideology, the SLI Ideology. It views standardization as hegemonistic just because English

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is a language spoken beyond its borders, and because exonormic standards of English pronunciation and usage are demanded of speakers who will never be able to meet the demands of the norm, mostly because the evaluators will constantly (and unfairly) shift the criteria to make attainment impossible.[18] There are differences, however, between standardization of a language like Tamil as compared to languages of wider communication like English. For one thing, Tamil is not a Language of Wider Communication, so the notion of hegemony over other languages does not arise. Second, Tamil already has a standard literary language. With the focus on standardizing the spoken language, different issues come to the fore, as follows.

(a) Tamil already has a strictly codified written norm (Literary Tamil), used and accepted by all Tamils (in Tamil Nadu, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, and Singapore); and it is LT that is the exclusive and excluding language. Mastery of its correct forms is difficult, and illiteracy is high. Ability to speak SST is less difficult to acquire than ability to master LT. If there is any notion of hegemony or inequality, it applies to LT.

(b) Tamil is not a language used widely beyond the membership of its mother-tongue community; there are very few non-native speakers, and the question of even teaching the spoken language to non-native speakers did not arise until rather recently.

(c) Because of Tamil's extreme diglossia, only LT was widely understood in the past, but only by educated or semi-educated speakers. Its spoken dialects (regional, social) vary widely; some dialects (e.g. Sri Lanka) are mutually unintelligible with Tamil Nadu dialects.

(d) LT as a panlectal standard had become archaic and problematic. The goal was to find a "hyperlect" or "edulect" acceptable to all, not marked by region or caste features. SST is the result.

DECISION-MAKING BODIES

Decisions about language standardization may be made by a body, or perhaps even by an individual (Pāṇini, Tolkāppiyanār, Martin Luther, Ben Yehuda). Such a body may have as its immediate task not the codification of the language, but the officialization or standardization of some text, e.g. the English Bible of 1611. Perhaps the work of one or more writers becomes the model for what is acceptable or not (Shakespeare, Goethe, Cervantes, Pushkin, Tagore). Large bodies, however, have more trouble coming to a decision than would small bodies or an individual; the decision-making process is simply too complex for any large group to do effectively. Therefore the Academy model, though perhaps politically necessary, is in actual practice very ineffective; it must delegate decision-making to subcommittees; and once the body is established, it becomes a force for conservativism, blocking even the most trivial reforms.[19] Purism or some other cultural agenda may hold sway, with passionate denunciations of the most innocent

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suggestions or proposals.[20] Sometimes academies, though given the ultimate authority, keep their finger on the pulse of the linguistic community and ask for suggestions and/or non-binding approval from their users of any changes they may suggest. By contrast, hyper-democracy in the language standardization process is usually counter-productive and may lead to the troubles experienced by Norway, where there were once frequent floor-fights in the national legislature over trivia such as the gender of nouns.

INFORMAL CONSENSUS

Another possible model for language standardization is an informal consensus model, in which a small but influential body of people (poets, intellectuals, writers) come to agree on the choice of a norm without any formal decision-making. This kind of linguistic decision-making is less well understood because it is noticed only retrospectively. The participants may not be conscious of what they are doing; but if we follow the accommodation theory of Giles & Smith 1979, we can see this as a kind of accommodation: People are making adjustments in their habits and tailoring their linguistic production to their perceptions of what their hearers/interlocutors want to hear. This kind of standardization is more likely to take place in the choice of spoken norms than in the choice of written norms. This was probably responsible for the choice of the British English spoken norm known as RP or Received Pronunciation (also known as RSE, or Received Standard English) after that apparently emerged when British public (i.e. private) schools came to prominence in the 18th and 19th centuries.[21] Generations of British leaders were trained in those schools, and there was remarkable consensus about what the RP norm was; yet no one had to issue edicts or officially declare any standards of pronunciation. There was already an agreed grammatical and syntactic system for standard English, but pronunciation was not, in the early days, explicitly standardized. Gradually, RP became to some extent a standardized pronunciation, though many experts now disagree about how extensive this was.

Similarly, in America, a grammatical/syntactic system of English quite similar to that used in Britain continued to be agreed on after the American Revolution (probably because of the "standardization" of the English Bible), with spellings influenced by Webster's dictionary and disseminated by McGuffy's Readers. By the end of the 19th century, a pronunciation norm for public speaking (preaching and oratory) held sway, based on the speech of graduates of prestigious Eastern seminaries and colleges (Harvard, Princeton, Yale) and the New York stage; as far as the pronunciation of final *r* was concerned, it was quite similar to the Southern British norm. In the early 20th century, however, this norm gave way, and sometime between the two world wars another model emerged, this time a rhotic (*r*-pronouncing) one. This model was, without much doubt, disseminated by radio, and within a generation it was also the norm in movies and television. It is known as "Broadcast Standard," and its best representation is the speech of

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news presenters on national networks, especially when reading from texts rather than speaking extemporaneously.[22] Commercial radio broadcasting in the US never set any standards for its announcers; there was no central ownership, no state-owned broadcasting system; there was never a school, a rule book, or a pronunciation guide, as there is for the announcers of the BBC, the CBC, or the NHK. The Broadcast Standard, because of its rhoticism, sounds more like Midwestern speech, though this impression is more that of Eastern Seaboard speakers than of Midwesterners. It is probably closest to the educated speech of Americans from large Northeastern cities other than New York, Boston, and other non-rhotic areas. Like the evolution of RP, American Broadcast Standard evolved without conscious control; yet both display remarkable uniformity.[23]

I claim that Standard Spoken Tamil also emerged via an informal decision-making process, similar to the way British RP and American Broadcast Standard evolved; but its emergence involved decision-making about the grammar and syntax as well as pronunciation. After a certain consensus was reached on the broad features of SST, it could become the natural choice for use in the "social" film. It was thus disseminated widely to Tamil speakers everywhere, serving both as a model of "correct" speech. This variety was spoken by the central characters, the hero and heroine, while character actors cast as buffoons and rustics provided models of "incorrect" speech; the "Jerry Lewis" character Nagesh was famous for this in the Tamil film, and other linguistic cultures have their equivalents.

These days it is fashionable, in many circles in the west, to deny both the existence and the legitimacy of standard English or other standard languages – because standards have often been used capriciously and maliciously, to deny non-standard speakers access to power. Therefore, we now hear and see a great deal about hegemony, power imbalance, linguistic prejudice, maintenance/denial of privilege, empowerment, and many other allusions to ideological control of language. Indeed, much wider tolerance is now permitted in the pronunciation of standard Englishes – American, British or other varieties – although there seems to be less tolerance in news broadcasting, for example, for non-standard grammatical forms such as negative concord (known popularly as "double negatives"). In broadcasting, of course, different levels are recognized for news readers, sports announcers, talk-show hosts, cartoon characters, and other informal roles.

However, as anyone who has ever had to teach a language knows, choices have to be made as to which forms to teach. Pedagogically, it is simply unworkable to accept any and all utterances that students produce. Thus teachers, especially language teachers, find it essential to adhere more or less strictly to one set of forms rather than to allow variation in students' writing and speech.[24]

New ways probably need to be devised to broaden the concept of standardization, to allow for variation, perhaps in register and domain, without giving up the whole notion of having a form of language of widest communication, or the utility of some kinds of agreed-on understandings. Too often, standard grammars are in fact norms for written language; but this gets forgotten when spoken lan-

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guage is taught, as it is today.[25] Computerization alone demands certain things; just try your spell checker (which also checks your grammar) and see if you agree with the kinds of decisions it makes about your usage. The fact is that, when all is said and done, speakers of natural languages make judgments about different kinds of speech and writing of which they hear and see samples, and some of those judgments are, like it or not, hierarchical social judgments. There seem to exist whole networks of understandings of what is appropriate speech/writing, and what is not. Another way of putting it is that there can exist forms of speech and writing that evoke no particularism; they do not remind us of any region or social class, and they do not immediately mark their user as a member of any particular class, caste, or ethnic group (other than the class of educated speakers). They convey content without calling attention to form. Understandings exist as to which form does this "best," and of course understandings can break down. In order to get a grasp on whether my own students have any consensus on what a non-particular form ("standard") might be, I have undertaken informal surveys about their linguistic preferences. I find that students who attack the notion of standard English do so mostly for their own convenience, not for the supposed benefit of subaltern non-standard speakers of the English language. They wish to be able to speak and write any way they please; but they also wish to receive written and spoken English communication in a standard form, as I have ascertained by testing their tolerance for messages (e.g. telephone information messages, pharmaceutical labels on medication, airline emergency evacuation announcements etc.) delivered in non-standard forms.[26]

In any event, the issue of standardization has become highly politicized in this day and age – perhaps more so than in some other periods, but perhaps not. In practically no society do people actually use language according to the rules that have been devised, rules which often date from a previous era. However, this is given as evidence, on the one hand, for (a) total decay and ruination of the language, leading to illogical thinking, moral turpitude, and the decline of civilization; or (b) non-existence of any such thing as a standard language – the notion being kept alive only to benefit an elite ruling class, a small coterie of mandarins, who in any event (behind closed doors) don't use the standard language either.

In the Tamil context, both these arguments are used: the first to validate the notion that the spoken varieties of Tamil are corrupt, decadent, and worthless, and the second (partially) to challenge the idea that there might be an alternative to the rigid literary standard. The essential thing to consider about standard language is that all the above can be true, and that there is still something to be said for its usefulness. Standards do change; words, phrases, and spellings that were highly stigmatized when I was a child have now become commonplace, and phrases I never thought I would utter now come from my own son's mouth. People now regularly split their infinitives, dangle their participles, and end sentences with prepositions. Most speakers of American English now use the form *you guys* as the plural of *you* – a form that was highly stigmatized when I was a child, and which I must

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remind my son not to use with his grandparents. We must remember, however, to distinguish between style and grammar; much of what is considered ungrammatical is actually different in style, since grammar is by definition the structure inherent in a language. If people use their language and are understood every day without miscommunicating, they are speaking grammatically.

Three or four decades ago an American cigarette commercial used the phrase *Winston tastes good, like a cigarette should.* English teachers were up in arms about this "error": One was supposed to say ... *as a cigarette should*, etc. Later the Winston people capitalized on the furor by airing another commercial: "What do you want, good grammar or good taste?" Some people may not care for the use of *like* for *as*, but it is hard to call this a grammatical error.[27] In other words, what may once have been considered ungrammatical may later have to be called a stylistic difference. And even if the word "standard" has become the whipping-boy of post-modernist culture critics, there are nevertheless "understandings" that people in various societies have about what kind of language is acceptable, and what is unacceptable, and what different kinds of language are for.

What teachers need is a framework to adhere to, so that they can be fair in their determination of what is acceptable and what is not; otherwise grading, promotion, and everything else they do will be capricious. But they also need to know the difference between style, register, and grammar, and to be able to teach it. They need to distinguish formal vs. informal styles of a language, and expository vs. creative writing, and to be able to convey these differences to their students.[28]

STANDARD SPOKEN TAMIL: WHAT IS STANDARD?

In the situation as it applies to Tamil, similar constraints apply. I can state, for example, that in most Tamil dialects (as well as in SST) there is very little variation in the past tense formation of verbs. Most verbs form past tenses as in LT; but in verb stems that end in final *i* (e.g. *teri* 'know', *uṭai* 'break') the past tense markers *nt*, *tt* that are typical of verb classes II, VI, and VII (the classification of Fabricius and Graul, Fabricius 1910) undergo palatalization to *nj*, *cc* in spoken Tamil.[29] This is consistent in all dialects with which I am familiar. It is therefore possible to state that this is a standard feature of SST, even though it is not the same process that is found in LT. There is evidence that palatalization actually began earlier, in LT, and was therefore in part incorporated into the orthography.[30]

Another feature of SST that is quite regular, though different from LT, is the use of what was formerly considered an "emphatic" marker, the clitic form *ee* as in *naan-ee vandeen* 'I (emphatic) came', which contrasts with emphatic *taan*, e.g. *naan-daan vandeen* 'I alone came; only I came.' This emphatic marker is semantically complex and difficult to describe,[31] but it can be used expressively in many ways in both LT and SST. One way that is new, and is in fact a semantic change, is its use as a redundant marker of location. That is, wherever LT has forms that indicate location – such as the locative case *il*, the "deictic" adverbs

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inku, *anku*, *enku*, the points of the compass, postpositions such as *meel* 'on, above', or *kiiṛ* 'below, down, under' – SST has these forms plus *ee*, i.e. *viiṭṭ(u)lee* 'in the house', *ingee*, *angee*, *engee* 'here, there, where', *meekkee*, *tekkee*, *vaḍakkee*, *keṛakkee* 'west, south, north, east', *meelee* 'on' etc. That this *ee* cannot be analyzed as simply an emphatic marker is shown by the fact that when emphasis is required, emphatic *ee* is added to forms already marked with *ee*: *viiṭṭukkuḷḷee-yee* 'right in the house', *angee-yee* 'right there' etc.

In fact, I would argue that this *ee* is perhaps not semantically new, but may be old; in Old Kannada, another Dravidian language, *ee* often functions as a locative marker. Whatever the truth may be, the addition of *ee* to semantically locative phrases in SST is quite regular, and moreover is semantically different from LT in this regard. (Here we run into another problematic area, that of instances in which the grammar, syntax, and/or semantics of SST differs from LT. To LT purists, there can be no such thing as SST having a different grammar or different syntactic rules, because this might lead to the notion that such a different system is somehow legitimate.)

Many other examples of systematic regularities in SST could be adduced;[32] the point of this paper is not to enumerate them all, but rather to try to show what kind of system(s) SST displays. We often find one-to-one correspondences, where LT has *x*, and SST has *y*; but we also find cases where something found in LT is not found in SST (such as plural marking in neuters, e.g. *avai* 'those things'),[33] or the use of the aspectual verb *vaa* to indicate historical or narrative past. However, we also find examples of SST constructions that are not found in LT, or do not have direct equivalents. A construction like *avan solraaple* 'as he says', which seems to be derived from some form of a verb plus *poola* 'like, as', has to go back to LT *avan solrapaṭiyee*; but how such forms arose has not been explained. SST has *kiṭṭee* as a postposition meaning 'near, on the person of', e.g. *avan-kiṭṭee* 'near him' (often reduced to *avan-ṭṭe* by deletion of *ki*, a regular process), but for this LT can use only *avaniṭam*.

Those who require a standardized language to exhibit no variation whatsoever will quickly point out that there are areas of great variation in SST, and these can also be described accurately. One is in the use of kinship terms, which vary tremendously from caste to caste. To avoid caste-marked forms, Tamil speakers often have to resort to English or to euphemisms; e.g., for 'wife' there is no caste-neutral form, so people may say *oyfu* (< *wife*) or *viiṭṭulee* 'in the house'. The same goes for many other terms, which are also used as address forms; thus *aṇṇaacci* 'elder brother' may be used as an address form to give mild respect to a younger man, but it is not the "standard" form for 'elder brother', which is *aṇṇaa* or *aṇṇan*. The former is originally a "vocative" form of the latter, but many vocative address forms have become terms of reference also; e.g., *ammaa* has replaced *taay* 'mother', *maamaa* has replaced *maaman* 'mother's brother'. This last form has now passed into Singapore English to refer to the kind of general store run by an person of Indian descent, selling

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newspapers and other sundries – the *maamaa kaḍe*. Other areas of variation are described below.

Plural Marking

Although plural marking is not obligatory for nouns in SST, it is for pronouns; animate nouns tend to be marked for plurality, and some other nouns are optionally so marked. The LT plural marker *-kaḷ* is rarely if ever realized in SST; instead, intervocalic *k* is softened to phonetic [h] to begin with and is often deleted, especially in extended syllables (e.g., *pookalaam* may be shortened to [poolaam] 'let's go'). Beyond that, there seems to be a perception in some dialects that the most common plural marker is *-ngaḷ* rather than *-kaḷ*, as in *maram* 'tree' → *marankaḷ*, pronounced [maranga]; so *-nga* is extended to other nouns as well. This is reinforced by the fact that *-nga* is also (perceived to be) the plural of some pronouns, e.g. *nii* 'you', *niinga*; *avan* 'he', *avanga*; *naama/naanga* 'we'. Therefore the commonest plural form we now find in SST is *-nga*, e.g. *koṛande* 'child', *koṛandenga*; *tambi* 'younger brother', *tambinga*. But note that the underlying form of *-nga* should actually be *nga(ḷ)*, because when any other morpheme follows, e.g. the question marker *aa*, the retroflex lateral appears: *koṛandengaḷaa?* 'children?'; *niingaḷaa?* 'you?' So we want to retain a form slightly more abstract than the phonetic spoken form *nga*, because it would simplify our grammar to do so.

Some "irregular" plural forms like *pasanga*, the plural of *payyan* 'boy', are difficult to explain according to the rules of LT; they are just there. I believe the [s] of this form to be an old alternation with [y], going back to Proto-South Dravidian; i.e., it is not just a modern "corruption." In fact, many forms found in ST are old but have existed in the nether regions of the language – never sanctioned by the grammars, but still ancient forms. Some other dialects use the *ka(ḷ)* form as their plural marker, realized as *nga(ḷ)* after words that end in nasals, and *ha* in other positions, e.g. *koṛandeha* 'children'. But intervocalic *k* (realized as [h]) is usually deleted in SST (e.g. in *pookalaam* becoming [poolaam] 'let's go', and all present tense markers of weak verbs have the *ki* deleted); so *-ka(ḷ)* is not very stable as a plural marker. Some dialects are known to use English plurals in some (foreign) words, e.g. *muslims* 'Muslims', or even both English *s* and a Tamil plural: *muslims-nga*. This would depend on whether the word was native or borrowed. Other speakers tend to substitute the quantifier *ellaam* 'all' for a plural marker: *andak kaṇakk-ellaam* '(all) those bills', *books-ellaam* '(all) the books'. There is a tendency for some reduplication to be used where English would have plural marking – *nyaayittukeṛame nyaayittukeṛame varraanga* 'they come on Sundays' – but this may be more to express repetitive or distributive notions. In fact, perhaps because of the collapse of some distinctions in the pronominal system (pronouns like *niir* 'you sg. polite' is now archaic), *-nga(ḷ)* has emerged as the strongest plural marker, much as English *s* emerged as one among many plurals (*oxen*, *children*, *kine*, *geese*) and has become the most productive marker in modern English. But because of the optionality of plural marking in nouns, and

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because the obligatory plural marking in animate nouns often involves kinship terms (variation!), SST has not yet been able to settle on this consistently. We need to survey speakers' ideas of what they consider preferable, and why they prefer one form over another; if we do, we will often find that justifications based on LT will be given, because LT is perceived as the "real" language. Thus ideas about the proper plural morphology would be derived from LT – which is of course a different system, with different rules about plural formation.

Past Neuters

Another area of variation is that of the past neuter forms of verbs. In LT this is simply *-adu*, as in *vandadu* 'it came', for all verbs except *poo* 'go' and *aaku* 'become' – which have the forms *pooyirru* 'it went' and *aayirru* 'it became'. There are also some verbs, those classified as III in the Fabricius/Graul scheme, which optionally may have this last ending, e.g. *tuunkirru* 'it slept', but may also have the "regular" ending, *tuunkinadu* or *tuunkiyadu*. But many forms of SST, especially those used in the Trichy-Tanjore area, have the *rru* form, which palatalizes in SST to [ccu] (or [cci]); this has spread from its restricted use with *poo* and *aahu* and as an optional marker of class III verbs, and it is now used as a past neuter form of verbs with all forms – not just *pooccu* and *aaccu*, found in all dialects, but *vanduccu* 'it came', *saappiḍucci* 'it ate' etc. This tendency is too strong to be excluded from notice; usually in SST, when there is a proliferation of forms, the "standard" choice has been to pick those closest to LT, but in this case the change cannot be ignored. Here we must admit variation. It may receive some stigmatization, but I have not tested this.[34]

Aspectual Verbs

The area of Tamil syntax known as aspectual verbs (*vinai nookku*) is an area where SST has changed; cf. *mara-nd-een* 'I forgot' vs. *mara-nd-iṭṭ-een* 'I completely forgot', with *(v)iṭu* 'completive'. This has expanded the aspectual system of LT in its inventory, in the level of grammaticalization of the system, and in the pragmatic use of the system. The system thus varies in a number of ways:

(a) Dialectally: Different spoken dialects use different "main" verbs as aspectual verbs; the set is finite but somewhat open-ended.

(b) Pragmatically: The way aspectual verbs are used, and for what purposes (i.e. their illocutionary force), varies tremendously. Aspectual verbs are not usually negated when declarative, but they may be when imperative, and they are more likely to be used in declarative sentences than in interrogative sentences; such facts make it difficult to write grammatical or syntactic rules for this part of the language.

(c) Grammatically: This is the question of to what extent aspect is now an internal morphological device (probably derivational rather than inflectional), and no longer a purely syntactic phenomenon. Evidence exists for variable gram-

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maticalization of aspect, but phonological variation indicates that it is not complete.

The aspectual system is therefore a very difficult system to describe and to master, especially for non-native speakers. Nonetheless, it is one of the more interesting and creative parts of the language, and it is vastly more complicated than in LT, partly because LT is not used pragmatically for communication, or for negotiating meanings.

Stigmatized Forms

It may come as a surprise to some speakers that SST – which is thought of as a variety without prestige, with no rules and regulations – may not admit certain forms because it considers them too low. In fact, there is also agreement in SST as to what is not allowed, or at least are "going a little too far."

One stigmatized feature is the tendency to round vowels when preceded by a labial consonant and followed (usually) by a retroflex consonant, as in *poṭṭi* (*peṭṭi*). What is interesting is that some forms with [o] are acceptable, e.g. *poṇṇu* 'female' (from LT *peṇ*), but some others are not, e.g. *(v)uuḍu* 'house' (< *viiḍu*) is not acceptable to some, but *(v)uuṭṭule* 'in the house' is acceptable. Studies need to be done of this phenomenon to determine how acceptable the rounding actually is.

Another tendency is the lenition of sequences of nasal plus consonant, particularly the sequence *ṇṭ* in some words but not others. LT *veeṇṭum* 'is wanted' regularly comes out as *veeṇum*, but the negative counterpart *veeṇḍaam* is not regularly realized as *veeṇaam* except when a brusque reply is required. That is, *veeṇḍaam* "means" '(I) don't want (something)' but *veeṇaam* is more casual or more emphatic: 'I don't want any! Get lost!' This lenition also occurs in some other forms, e.g. *koṇḍaandu* (from *koṇḍuvandu* 'having brought') may be laxed to *koṇṇaandu* as in *ellaatteyum koṇṇaandiṭṭrundeen* 'I brought all the stuff'. Interestingly, this lenition has long since been completed in other consonant-plus-nasal sequences in SST: [mp] can be laxed to [mm] or [m] as in *kaaṇpikkoḷḷaveeṇṭum* 'I want to show', which comes out in SST as *kaamikkaṇum*. The alveolar sequence *nr* has long since become [ṇṇ] in non-Brahman dialects (and [nn] in Br. dialects). The tendency is for all this to happen after long vowels, but not always. This process is complete in Tamil's sister language, Malayalam, but it has not been discussed in print regarding Tamil. The same is true for sequences of *nk* → [ŋg] becoming [ŋŋ].

Case and Postpositions

A final area of great variation in SST is that of case-markers and postpositions. Although there is overall agreement as to the nature of the traditional case system (the seven-case-plus-vocative system of Tolkāppiyam) and what its forms are, it is not possible to hold to this eight-case system in SST (it probably is not in LT, either, and was problematical even for Tolkāppiyanār). Now we must admit to fuzzy boundaries between case markers and postpositions. Thus *iliruntu* 'ablative', though clearly made up of two pieces (*il* 'locative' and *iruntu* 'past parti-

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ciple of *iru* 'be'), seems to be a case because Sanskrit had an ablative. But there are many other instances in which postpositions can substitute for case markers (cf. *viiṭṭu-meelee* 'on top of the house' vs. *viiṭṭu-kku meele* 'above the house'); or we may get a case marker followed by a case-marked postposition (e.g. *viiṭṭ-ukku pakkattu-lee* 'near the house'). Such variation is not a problem for SST per se, but it is perceived as a problem by those who see grammar as invariant and/or as governed by rules set down in the 13th century. In fact, the seven-case system, as already mentioned, was problematical for Tolkāppiyanār, who had to admit two markers in the instrumental – *aal* as instrumental, and *uṭan* (modern *ooṭu*), the latter being "sociative" – because there was no place for them both in a seven-case system. If Tolkāppiyanār had not bought the Sanskrit seven-case system lock, stock, and barrel, but had opened up the Tamil system to let it fit the Tamil facts, then we could now allow other facts of Tamil to be accounted for, and the case/postposition system is one of these. I note that the new syllabus for Tamil in Singapore schools, to be used from 1998, no longer talks about seven (or eight) *veerrumai*, but treats each case marker as a kind of *veerrumai*. This is a welcome change; the system that has been used is unworkable, mainly because it has been kept in the seven-case box for two long.

DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES

I believe that SST is already highly uniform, and that this uniformity has somehow been involved with the spread of mass media that use it, such as radio and film. Impressionistic accounts (A. K. Ramanujan, p.c.) describe the development of this inter-caste, interregional form as taking place in college hostels, where young educated people from all over Tamil Nadu come together and must negotiate some form of communication. The inter-caste inter-regional form used to be the Brahman dialect, but this is no longer the case; now even Brahmans use non-Brahman Tamil, and clearly SST has evolved out of this panlectal NBR dialect soup.

I have used expressions like "SST does not allow form *x*" or "When in doubt, SST prefers forms close to LT"; and with such locutions I have spoken as if SST were a person or a decision-making body. In fact, the decisions that go into the choice of this form or that are covert; i.e., they are not available for observation. However, anecdotal reports from speakers who have learned their SST in college hostels confirm that a kind of decision-making process goes on. Certain forms are stigmatized, e.g. Brahman forms, so Brahman speakers quickly learn not to use their home dialect, if they have not already figured this out.[35] Other speakers may bring regional or caste forms to the process, only to have them stigmatized through ridicule and other forms of overt comment; they quickly learn to not use these forms again. If this business sounds familiar, it is probably because a similar process seems to have evolved in English public schools in the 18th and 19th century, whence the "standard" Received Pronunciation evolved.

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The interesting thing in this decision-making is that it is not governed by rules set by lexicographers, eminent writers, or any of the other elite language control entities found in many societies, e.g. the French Academy or the Duden Gesellschaft for German. Yet college students are an elite, and they have in common that they are or were educated, either in English or in Tamil (I do not have a date for the evolution of this NBr. SST).[36] Originally, then, the body of people who made the decisions were most likely to have been male, of higher non-Brahman castes, and from families wealthy enough to afford higher education of the Western type. This is not at all unlike the situation applying in the British RP model.

In the mid-20th century, it is clear that the chief disseminator of this SST has been the modern Tamil "social" film. There is remarkable uniformity of SST irrespective of whether the studios were dominated by the DMK political party or the Congress – that is, usage is similar in MGR films and Sivaji Ganesan films, to take only two examples. Despite the DMK's public oratorical style, which emphasizes a purified, archaized, and highly alliterative Tamil, their films used SST that varied hardly at all from the kind found in other studios' films, except when the hero expatiates in the special DMK-preferred alliterative style. This variety is also found in the stage dramas of the social variety that have a symbiotic relationship with the Tamil film industry; it is also used in radio plays, and to a lesser extent in television. Another place where some kind of SST is also used, but with less consistency, is in the so-called "social" novel and short story. Here writers are involved, but not as prime movers in the decision-making process.

Beginning with the advent of novel and short-story writing in Tamil, there evolved a kind of literature that was concerned with social problems, moral uplift, the independence movement, and other social issues brought on by the collision of colonialism with traditional India. This kind of prose-writing did not actually exist before, nor did almost any kind of prose: Traditionally, everything in Indic languages tends to be in sutras, more suitable for memorization. To make the new writings appear to reflect the lives of real people, writers began to use some spoken styles in dialogs. Never, to my knowledge (or perhaps very rarely), was a novel or short story written entirely in a spoken style. The narrative and descriptive portions of the novel are always written in a form that I would call modern Literary Tamil, which does not admit most of the spoken changes that have occurred since the 13th century, but is more relaxed about, e.g., sandhi rules, than older forms would be. However, the dialog portions are not perfect examples of spoken Tamil; we cannot use them as true phonetic renditions of how people actually spoke, because there are a number of inconsistencies in this use:

(a) Writers vary; some use SST in their dialogs; some don't. The well-known modern writer Mu. Varadarajan did not use much spoken dialog in his writings, though he often wrote about it.

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(b) Some use it everywhere in spoken style; some use it only for effect. Sometimes there is a switch from SST to LT for a certain kind of effect, from LT to SST for another kind of effect.

(c) Some writers place SST only in the mouths of rustic or comic characters, reserving a more LT style for the "heroic" or main characters. This is also true in Western writing; Shakespeare has his "high" characters speak "standard" English, but his buffoons and grave-diggers and "low" characters speak dialect, and they speak it in prose rather than verse.

(d) Even when consistency is attempted, we are more likely to find SST forms in the verb forms of the sentence than in the noun forms. I have discussed the reasons for this in an earlier article (Schiffman & Arokianathan 1986) – issues of recognizability, of position in the sentence, and other non-linguistic reasons for lack of phoneticity can be adduced.

(e) Writers may simply not consider it important to be consistent, since there are no rules and therefore nobody will be offended if one sentence contains *mudalilee* 'at first', and another sentence *modallee*. It is just a fact that things written in a non-standard form of language are difficult to decipher, even if they are phonetically correct. English speakers are used to seeing the word *once* spelled that way, and would find it strange to see it spelled ⟨wunts⟩, even though the latter is phonetically closer to what most people say. In English, phonetic spellings are sometimes used in cartoons and other non-standard writing (advertising is another genre), but certain words are never tampered with: *know* is always spelled with a /k/ and a /w/ even though phonetically it would just be [no]. Obviously comprehensibility would be affected if one went totally phonetic, even in writing dialect. Anyway, a writer's goal is not to report phonetic "field work," but to communicate something, in this case something "social" about certain characters in the story; and since non-standard language is often associated with certain social characteristics (perhaps stereotypically) in the minds of the linguistic community, a phonetic rendering may tell something more succinctly than a detailed description of, e.g., the character's rusticity and bumptiousness. If an American Southern writer has a character say *It idn't none of your bidness* instead of *It ain't none of your bidness* or *He dudn't know the answer* (instead of *He don't* [*doesn't*?] *know the answer*), this is done for a particular effect and with an expectation that certain understandings exist in the minds of the readers about what these details mean. Both of these alternatives are non-standard, but they are non-standard in different ways and are used with different effect.

WRITTEN AND UNWRITTEN STANDARDS

We may speak of an informal standardizing process taking place, and we may recognize the kinds of standardization and regularity that exist in SST; however, some people are still loath to admit that a speech form can be standard(ized)

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unless it has a written grammar, a book between two covers. This is because they believe that grammars are imposed or bestowed on languages – not that languages have grammars, rules and regularities that people can discover and organize into a book. I would like to introduce another notion here: Although Spoken Tamil may not be completely standardized (i.e., there are areas of variability), it is in a position where standardization could in fact be brought about. That is, the potential for standardizing the language exists; and if certain conditions were met, the process could be completed. The conditions necessary would, in my opinion, be the following.

(a) In areas where inconsistency and variability exist – where people do not agree on the form to choose, such as past neuters – attitude and usage surveys could be undertaken. The areas of variability could be subject to questionnaires to determine what people think of, e.g., the *cci* past neuter, and whether it should be made the standard, or allowed as a variant, or excluded.

(b) Educated Tamilians from various communities and regions could make formal decisions about the areas where doubts exist; this would be a revolutionary idea, but it could be done.

(c) Consensus could be reached on having flexible stability rather than rigid stability, in order to allow for the possibility that certain sound changes, such as the rounding of front vowels between initial labials and before retroflex consonants, might complete themselves.

(d) A newer, more open way to obtain recommendations for development of new vocabulary could be agreed on, allowing for flexibility and opening the language to natural and folk resources, rather than only classical resources.

CONFESSIONS OF A STANDARDIZER

Since I have actually written a book called *A grammar of Spoken Tamil* (1979), it may be of some use to reveal what things were in the back of my head when I did it. Did I simply record what I had found, or did I choose one of two competing alternatives in a capricious and prejudicial way? Did the decisions I made help to perpetuate linguistic inequality, or the hegemony and privilege of a particular class of Tamil speakers? Or did I simply ratify the existing situation, namely that standardization has already taken place, and all I did was to describe it?

Regularity

Most of the time, my concern was with regularity: with finding what patterns repeated themselves in the grammar of SST, and stating this. When competing alternatives existed, I chose the one that seemed to be close to what I generally heard non-Brahmans use. Thus a time-expression marker such as Verb + *pootu*, meaning 'when (X) verb(s)', can occur either as *irukkr-appa*, *irukkr-appo*, or *irukkr-appam*, where the *-am* portion is actually a nasalized [õ]. The LT form of

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this would more likely be *irukkum pootu*, and some speakers would use this to disambiguate their speech, if an interlocutor didn't understand *irukkr-appa* etc. In fact, this rule of thumb ("Disambiguate by using LT, or something close to it"), is a fairly useful one; all literate Tamilians use it, though only some feel that they should use it all the time. Thus the LT-like *irukkum poodu*, with a nasalized [ũ] to tell us it is spoken, not LT, is also a feature of SST; it is not a totally "natural" thing for the spoken language, but it is used. In fact, other things like it are also used, which means that it is a kind of "elaborated style" in Basil Bernstein's sense; it is neither SST nor LT. It is perhaps akin to what speakers of French sometimes do, spelling out a word to disambiguate it: *Il lui faut la mer, m-e-r* 'He needs the sea (not his mother)'. Chinese speakers are also known to finger-spell Chinese characters in the air or on their palms to disambiguate certain forms.

Pedagogy

Since the goal of my grammar was to provide something that was pedagogically useful for second-language learners of Tamil, and since literate Tamilians invoke literary forms in case of doubt, I also chose to do so when it made certain things more simple pedagogically. For example, the present-tense marker for all "strong" verbs in Tamil is *kkr*, and for weak verbs it is *r*: *paar-kkr-een* 'see-PRES-1SG, i.e. I see'; *poo-r-een* 'go-PRES-1SG, I go'. This is so for all verbs except the copula *iru*, which has a present-tense marker *kk* only: *iru-kk-een* 'be-PRES-1SG, I am'. However, because this verb has a LT form with LT *kkir* like any other verb, I chose to not make an issue of this point except as a footnote, when discussing *iru* in particular. That is, no one will fail to understand *irukkreen* when they themselves say *irukkeen*, and students are burdened with one less rule.

On the other hand, *iru* also has an "irregular" neuter singular form; the LT form is *irukkiratu*, but the spoken form is just *irukku*. Some speakers do produce a form *irukkutu* [irukkudu], but the more LT-like *irukkradu* would be a step beyond that. Because *irukku* is the most common, I chose to list it as such; if learners encounter *irukkutu*, they will understand it. Here frequency of use took precedence over regularity. For literate Tamilians, the LT variety always comes first, and they can always consult the grammar of LT in their heads if they have questions; for them, SST should always defer to LT and be based on it. This viewpoint does not allow for the possibility that foreigners might not have grammars of LT in their heads to consult in moments of doubt. However, the second-language learner of Tamil must at some point confront the fact of the grammar of LT, since it is culturally expected and is sometimes useful to know; in any event, practically all reference works are written about LT. A person writing a grammar of Spoken Tamil cannot ignore the existence of LT, even though American linguistics may tell him that literary languages are irrelevant. One must find a golden mean between the structure of the spoken language and the structure (some of it quite identical and useful) of LT. Tamil is a diglossic language (Britto 1986), and this fact must be

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acknowledged; what linguists must also admit is that, in a diglossic language, the spoken variety is strongly influenced by the literary variety. This fact is inescapable; it is well-nigh oppressive. But the spoken language also has life and juice and zing that the literary variety does not possess – it has a life of its own that is often lacking in the stultified norms of LT.

Simplicity

Another criterion that we value in linguistics is that of simplicity. We are taught that linguistic descriptions are best if simple, and that simplicity, when found in a language, should be preserved. When one is forced to learn the rules of both LT and SST, it is simplest if one can learn them in a way that proceeds simply from one set to the other. This criterion underlies some of the decisions made above, such as the choice of *kkr* as the present-tense marker for *iru*, even though it is more commonly *kk*. At an earlier period I would have castigated myself for giving in to the rules of LT; but since life is short, whatever is simplest is best.

Stigmatized Forms

Although SST is stigmatized from above by LT, it also has forms that it stigmatizes. Those that are neither vulgar nor obscene, but still need to be dealt with, are things like the rounding of *e* and *i* already mentioned, or the deocclusion of NC to NN in some places. In such cases, I am forced to choose whichever form is most acceptable, but this leads to a funny kind of irregularity already noted: *poṇṇu* 'girl' is acceptable, *(v)uuṭu* 'house' is not, but *(v)uuṭṭlee* 'in the house' is. This is no problem for the student who does not know LT; for students knowing LT it seems strange that the rounding has proceeded irregularly through the lexicon. To the variationist, it is simply evidence of a sound change in process.

Abstractness

One of the differences between LT and ST is the apparent deletion of certain final consonants in SST, such as final laterals and rhotics, and the nasalization of final vowels. If one were to be perfectly true and phonetic about this, one would state that SST and LT differ in the presence and or absence of these sounds, but this is oversimplifying. In fact, most of these sonorants are only absent when the word or morpheme in question occurs before pause; but if anything is added, such as case, or clitics, or interrogative markers, the sound is not deleted. Thus the LT form *vantaal* 'if X comes' has a spoken analog *vandaa*. but if anything is added, such as *um* 'even', then LT and SST forms are identical: *vantaal-um* 'even if X comes'. Thus the "underlying" or "base" forms of many morphemes in SST will be the same as in LT; what will differ is that in final position, before pause, certain consonants can (and will) be deleted.

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Conclusion

Thus I have – in the interests of simplicity, regularity, and other criteria that linguists generally use – made decisions about what form or other is "standard," even in cases where variation in the language may exist. This is, I think, no violation of anybody's rights, nor does it do any injustice to the language. No Tamilian ever tells me they can't understand the forms I use; I never have trouble making myself understood on the telephone (where people can't see my face, and therefore don't expect me to be speaking English); all the forms I have chosen are in fact used by SOMEBODY, though there is perhaps no one individual who speaks exactly the way I have described the language. Thus it is perhaps the case that no native speaker of SST exists yet; everybody still speaks their local dialect most of the time, reserving SST for inter-caste, inter-regional communication. As long as people are closely bound in kinship systems, this will certainly mean that special caste-related kin terms will be used that cannot be used by all castes. Perhaps, then, only foreigners or Singaporeans will speak SST.

This brings me to my last point. I find that, in general, Singapore spoken Tamil (at least that variety still learned at home as a native language, i.e. not the variety learned only at school) is more or less congruent with SST; the few things I notice that are different include a tendency to use more LT-like forms than Indian Tamils would use. Singaporeans say *perroorkaḷ* for 'parents', whereas Tamilians in TN would say *appaa-mmaa*. Singaporeans say *muunru* for 'three' instead of SST *muuṇu*, and I hear some other hypercareful forms. But aside from the occasional Malay word, I do not notice great differences. That is, I cannot tell from Singaporeans' Tamil (except in the two words mentioned), whether they are Singapore-born or India-born – even though I can tell from their English.

NOTES

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[1] I do not wish in any way to validate the notion that the written variety is actually the historical antecedent of the spoken dialects, since there is evidence that spoken dialects sometimes preserve forms that are historically older than LT. However, the LT variety does exert some kind of gravitational pull, and forms that exist in LT can be used (with some spoken modification) when ST forms fail to be understood. I also ignore the question of whether LT forms are the phonological underlying forms of spoken Tamil forms, though in fact the two issues are related; in many cases, LT IS both the historical and underlying antecedent of spoken forms.

[2] The idea that LT has not changed since the 13th century is also a fiction. E. Annamalai has shown how this norm, designed for poetic writing, is inadequate for modern prose writing, and in particular, how modern writing conventions not covered by the poetic rules have crept in and gained general currency, despite slavish pundit devotion to Pavanandi's rules.

[3] However, it is used to depict oral communication between mythical beings or deities, as in the so-called "mythological" film.

[4] Tamil linguistic culture strongly reveres the literary dialect and considers it the "real" language. Spoken dialects are given no respect; they are treated as substandard or as used only by uneducated people.

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[5] Schiffman & Arokianathan 1986 have presented reasons why this is so variable.

[6] Curiously, the notion is widespread in Singapore that the Tamil spoken there is deficient in some way; but in fact, Singapore Tamil is probably closer to SST overall than any cross-section of Tamil speakers in India. This is not the first attempt to address this issue; there exists a growing body of literature on the notion of SST – whether it exists, how it is defined etc. Most of this discussion has not left the realm of academia, however, so we may review the discussion in terms of its practical application.

Although Asher 1982 does not explicitly characterize the variety he describes as a STANDARD one, it is in most cases identical to the one I describe. Since he and I have not collaborated in any way on our studies of Tamil, but in fact have reached our (more or less identical) conclusions independently, it seems that this variety is well known, common, and widely understood. In short, it exhibits some of the features of what elsewhere is known as linguistic "standardization."

[7] The variability in television stems from the wide variety of spoken "genres" available in that medium. In a "high" genre such as news presentation, LT is used; but in "lower" genres such as talk shows, sitcoms etc., more authentic spoken Tamil is in evidence.

[8] I do not wish, however, to give the impression that perfect uniformity is a prerequisite of standardized languages.

[9] By this I mean the commitment to memory of large bodies of texts, such as was once common practice by Brahman priests, who memorized Vedic texts, the Upanishads, and other Sanskrit "literary" works, as described by Staal.

[10] For a review of Tamil purism, see Britto 1986 or Schiffman 1996. Crowley 1989 provides a helpful overview of the emergence of the notion of "standard" English.

[11] There are probably not many languages in this situation, but Arabic is one that shows parallels with Tamil, and the literature on Arabic is quite instructive.

[12] For useful definitions of corpus planning vs. status planning, see Eastman (1983:70 ff.)

[13] Usually these involve competing alternatives: Is the plural of English 'brother' *brethren* or *brothers*? Is the past of 'dive' *dove* or *dived*? Is 'no one' spelled *noone*, *no-one*, or *no one*?

[14] Prescriptive grammars, of course, tell people what (and what not) to say or write; they tend to avoid giving alternatives, or to state "There are no rules for this sort of thing; say anything you like."

[15] In Sri Lanka, the notion of accepting or not accepting the "unifying" ability of SST is another matter, since SST is understood but not accepted as an intercaste mode of communication among Sri Lankan Tamils. This matter will not be resolved until the civil war in that island has ended.

[16] There is also a tendency, if no LT norms are used, to lapse occasionally into what might be considered by some as VULGARITY or impoliteness, since the spoken norm has never been used for occasions at which solemnity, dignity, or respectfulness are called for. This same charge has been leveled in other linguistic cultures, e.g. in Swiss German, where spoken norms now dominate television to the almost total exclusion of standard German (Schiffman 1991.)

[17] Note that the Standard Language Ideology holds two contradictory views at once: (a) Standardization is harmful; and (b) standardization is, in any case, a figment of someone's imagination. The current debate over English is motivated by notions that standard English is "imperialistic" (Phillipson 1992) in its effect on non-standard Englishes. These standards are used to exclude or disempower, and are applied capriciously in order to preserve the hegemony of the powerful.

[18] "Exonormic" is the term used in Singapore, where all linguistic standards are pegged to norms set outside the country: British standards for English, Beijing standards for Chinese, Malaysian standards for Malay, and Tamil Nadu LT standards for Tamil.

[19] The much-vaunted Académie Française delegated its first dictionary-making to an individual (Claude Favre de Vaugelas); its main accomplishment since the 17th century has been to block changes in French orthography and grammar.

[20] A recent attempt at spelling reform in France (1989–1990), only one of many proposed for French in this century, was very minor and actually had the support of the French Academy; but public outcry has put the endeavor into jeopardy.

[21] Crowley (1989:190) offers evidence that the beginnings of spoken RP "standard" can be traced much further back, to the 15th century or earlier. He quotes various sources to show that RSE was spoken by products of "the older Public Schools."

[22] The older norm, still in some use – especially on the New York stage when I was a child – is now represented only by actors who are in their nineties, such as Katherine Hepburn.

[23] RP long ago came under the aegis of the BBC etc. and can also be learned in acting schools, so it is not safe to say that it is no longer consciously controlled. The American norm was itself not

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without ways of stigmatizing non-standard speech; the comedy shows of the 1930s and 1940s depended on comedians who had gotten their start in vaudeville, where the "dialect joke" (making fun of the speech of the Irish, Italians, Jews, Swedes, or Negros) was pervasive. Non-standard speech was lampooned in various ways, usually by having a non-standard speaker who played the role of buffoon: Fred Allen's "Mrs. Nussbaum," Jack Benny's NBC telephone operators etc. Of course, these popular programs could also lampoon the speech of the "upper classes," e.g. that of Mrs. Buff-Orpington, a character on the radio show *Blondie*, or the RP speech of upper-class "twits" in British comedy shows.

[24] My own impetus to write my 1979 grammar came when I was preparing teaching materials for the advanced level of spoken Tamil. I wanted to summarize what grammatical information students would need in order to be able to use the material to best advantage, without having to state and restate the grammar in every commentary on every sentence. I was reminded of the difficulty of teaching non-standard dialects recently when I spent two summers directing a Southeast Asian Summer Language Institute. One of the languages taught was Vietnamese, the standard pronunciation and grammar of which are based on the Hanoi dialect. Many people from the Saigon area resent this standard and would like to teach Saigon dialect instead; many émigrés from Vietnam are southerners, who have never liked the northern standard; and many foreigners would like to work in the south, where Hanoi standard is rarely spoken. But the task of trying suddenly to come up with teaching materials, texts, tapes and reference grammars for Saigon Vietnamese is a daunting one; one cannot do this overnight. Finding teachers who would be not only willing but able to teach this dialect confidently would also be difficult. In the end, I strongly resisted the project of teaching Saigon dialect, simply on the grounds of logistic difficulty.

[25] In the case of Tamil, the 13th-century grammar is a grammar of poetic conventions, not intended for prose.

[26] When presented with a sample birth certificate labeled *BRTH SRTIFICUT*, or a bottle of pills with instructions for use written in Pitcairnese, or with recorded telephone information messages delivered in Louisiana Creole, these advocates of the rights of non-standard speakers suddenly wish to exclude certain kinds of messages from this "free-to-be-me" dictum. Part of the problem may be that modern American undergraduates have such a narrow understanding of the different genres of writing – having never been required to write anything but a journal – that other registers and varieties, and their uses, are foreign to them.

[27] The grammatical "rule" in question, of course, is that "*as* is a conjunction, while *like* is a preposition; *like* should not be used as a conjunction." In fact *like* is used like a conjunction every day by millions of speakers of English.

[28] Even though I have spent almost thirty years of my life learning Tamil, I can report that most of my Tamil teachers were never able to explain why certain of my Tamil sentences were "ungrammatical," until I finally figured out for myself that what they were unhappy with was largely the STYLE of my sentences, not my grammar. The usual explanation ("We just don't say that") was deemed sufficient as an elucidation. Unfortunately, this way of teaching "grammar" is often the norm.

[29] Graul's classification is also used in Arden 1954.

[30] Palatalization probably began at a point when Tamil and Malayalam were still considered one language, since Malayalam also shows palatalization, but the other South Dravidian languages do not; there is evidence for it in inscriptions as early as the 5th century.

[31] In fact, the subject of such markers is complex; the best analysis of Tamil "emphatic" clitics is in Arokianathan 1981.

[32] See the Appendix for a fairly comprehensive list.

[33] Plural marking in neuters may actually be newer than lack of plural marking; thus the neuter future form is never marked for plurality, though the neuter present and past may be. The neuter future forms are obviously an older system than the marking of animate future with *pp* etc.

[34] That is, if a sentence has too many verbs in it with *cci* pasts, people may make fun of it. The "expression" *ci* is an expletive, used to express disgust with something, so taboo may prevent the spread of this form.

[35] Anybody who has ever seen a Tamil film (and what young Tamil person hasn't?) knows what kinds of things are made fun of in the movies.

[36] In the early days of Western-style higher education in India, many students were not literate in Tamil, but only in English. Today there is likely to be more Tamil literacy than there used to be; however, it is not clear that those most literate in Tamil have the most weight in the decision-making process.

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APPENDIX

Phonological "rules" that have applied in SST. These are rules that a linguist would characterize as having been added to the grammar of LT, the application of which gives SST as the output.

(1) Palatalization: *tt, nt* → *cc, nj* after high front vowels ([i, ai]) as in *paṭitteen* → *paḍicceen* 'I studied'. Found in all dialects, perfectly regular.

(2) Doubling of sonorants in CVC where V is short: *kal* → *kallu* 'stone'.

(3) In monosyllabic CVC, where V is long, add *u*; but not in all dialects: *naaḷ* → *naaḷu* 'day' (or *naa*).

(4) *ḷ* in plurals, pronouns, and verbs is deleted in final position, otherwise present.

(5) Nasalization of final *Vm*, *Vn* (but not *Vṇ*)

(6) Lowering of *i, u* to *e, o* in sequence (C) ... Ca, as in *iṭam* → *eḍam* 'place', *uṭkkaaru* → *okkaaru* 'sit'.

(7) Deletion of *l, r, ḷ* before stops, internally: *uṭkkaarndeen* → *okkaanteen* 'I sat'.

(8) General cluster reduction: *uṭkaaru* → *okkaaru* 'sit'; *keeṭkireen* → *keekkreen* 'I ask'.

(9) Monophthongization of *ai* to *e*: in accusatives, noun endings, and internally. Exception: in monosyllables, *vai* → *vayyi* 'put, place'.

(10) Intervocalic *v* and *k* deletion: This is complicated, but examples are: *paarkkavillai* → *paakkale* 'didn't see'; *pookaveeṇṭum* → *pookaṇum* 'must go', *pookiṟeen* → *pooreen* 'I go'; *koṇṭuvaa* → *koṇḍaa* 'bring'.

(11) Intervocalic deletion of *ṟ*, the retroflex frictionless continuant: This sound often is merged with [l], but in some cases it is deleted instead, resulting in compensatory lengthening: *poṟutu* → [poodu] 'time'; *eṟuntiruntaar* → *eendirundaaru* 'he has risen'.

(12) Rounding: [i, e] → [u, o] between Labial ... Retroflex consonants: *poṇṇu* 'girl', *poṭṭi* 'box', *(v)uuḍu* 'house', *puḍi* 'like', but also: *mita* → [moda] 'float', *piranteen* → [porandē] 'I was born'. Some of these may be more acceptable than others.

Optional or stigmatized developments include the following.

(a) Already described: NC cluster reduction is variable, and somewhat stigmatized: *veeṇum* 'want, need' is okay, but *veeṇaam* 'don't want, not needed' is not; *koṇṭaandeen (koṇṭuvandeen)* 'I brought' is okay, *koṇṇaandeen* 'ibid.' is not.

(b) Rounding of vowels before retroflex *ḷ* in Br. dialect: *niingo* 'you pl.', *avango* 'they'.

(c) Metathesis: Br. dialect *enakku* → [neekku] 'to me'; *unakku* → [onakku] → [nookku] 'to you' etc.

(d) Other dialects: Merge [l], [ḍ], [ṟ]; some merge [n] and [ṇ]. Retroflexion is lost except in [ṭ] (vs. [t]).

(e) Unrounding of [u] when nasalized: Coimbatore *veeṇum* 'want, need' → [veeṇĩ].

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