

## Tamil-English Mixed Language Used in Tamilnadu

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### **Abstract**

In multilingual societies where several languages are used by different speech communities speakers tend to know two or more than two languages. People who live in a bilingual or multilingual communication environment usually have the tendency to use two or more codes while communicating with each other. People not only speak different languages/codes but also mix the languages/codes known to them. Code mixing is used as a linguistic device in informal styles of speaking. This paper looks into the features of code mixed Tamil and English used by many people in Tamilnadu.

### **Introduction**

Code mixing of the mother tongue and English is a common speech behaviour used by bilingual people in India. This field of research has been investigated by several linguists (Verma, 1969, 1976; Kachru, 1994; Annamalai, 1978, 2001; Sridhar, 1978; Pandharipande, 1983; Vaid, 1980; Singh, 1985, 1995). Language experts have studied the causes, functions, characteristics and effects code mixing. Such investigations have revealed the sociolinguistic, structural and psycholinguistic aspects of these language contact phenomena.

The yearning to use English is becoming a universal phenomenon. English is associated with the ideology of modernity and progress, and the native languages with the ideology of tradition and cultural values. In the local Tamil media, such as Television and Radio, we find the use of many English words. The mixing of Tamil and English is so commonly noticed that the concept of a 'pure' language is slowly becoming obsolete. English is increasingly used in spoken Tamil discourse. Going by the increasing use of code mixing, some have the exaggerated fear that Tamil speakers, in the future, maybe using Tamil words only as connectors to knit together English words, and call it spoken Tamil.

Code mixing is used as a strategy to facilitate communication. The alternate use of Tamil and English within the same discourse has a pattern. This study deals with the features of Tamil-English code mixing. The objective of the study is not only to investigate the amount of code mixing, but also the nature of code mixing found in the recorded speech of the respondents. This paper gives a description of the way in which Tamil speakers combine English and Tamil.

### **Method of data collection**

The respondents were shown a picture-story consisting of eight pictures arranged sequentially on a sheet of paper. They were given time to look at the pictures and figure out the story. They were then asked to narrate it in the form of a meaningful story. Oral narration was preferred as it is a natural, spontaneous, innovative and unconscious process, compared to writing, which is a highly conscious act. The language output produced by the respondents based on the picture story shown to them was recorded. Respondents were heard discussing among themselves that the aim of the study was to see who narrated the story accurately. The respondents were unaware that it was the language that was being taken into consideration and not the accuracy of the facts. Hence, this method was very close to recording natural conversation which is done in most of the researches of this kind. One hundred and thirty speech samples were collected.

## Data analysis

The spoken data obtained through the story narration was analyzed qualitatively. After collecting the language data, the narration was transcribed from the audiotapes. In the transcription of the recorded data each orthographic unit was coded as Tamil, mixed or English. The total number of words in each narration was counted. The word count was established on the basis of the transcription. The percentage of English words in each sample was calculated. For the purpose of analysis, each orthographic unit in Tamil was considered as one word. The English words occurring in the code mixed corpus were separated. A percentage count of the type of mixing was also performed to check which English linguistic unit was more preferred in mixing with Tamil. Since Tamil is the principal language of the sample group and has the majority of lexical items that appear in the speech events and activities, it is the matrix language of our study. A phonemic transcription of the recorded data was done. The data in Tamil was transcribed into Times New Roman script using the font conversion software.

The recorded text was analyzed to check the percentage of code mixing in the actual context. A simple percentage method was adopted in the analysis to determine the frequency of code mixing among Tamil-English bilinguals. The total number of words in the text was calculated and the total number of English words was also calculated. The percentage of code mixing was calculated thus,

$$CM \% = \frac{\text{total no. of English words} + \text{total no. of mixed words}}{\text{total no. of words}} \times 100$$

Where the morphemes were from two languages (turning/a) the word was counted as a mixed word.

### Percentage of Code Mixing

Many occurrences of code mixing were recorded in the taped narrations. Based on the definition of code mixing proposed for this study, there are 3033 mixes out of 9205 words. This goes to prove that the corpus consisted of 32.94% of code mixing. The data reveals that mixing of English words is approximately in the range of 11 to 30 percent by most of the respondents during the story narration. Some respondents had mixed lexical items to the extent that their narration had 5 words in English out of 18 words in total (27%). There are some instances where the percentage of use of English has been as high as 52 percent.

### Hierarchy of Mixed Constituents

Code mixing in the form of lexical insertions is frequently found in the discourse of Tamil-English bilinguals. At the lower end of the continuum are full sentence switches that are very rare and are done only by fluent bilinguals. Less fluent bilinguals resort to mixing of nouns, verbs, or use the English words with Tamil inflections.

English nouns and verbs figure predominantly in their speech. In this way, there is a relatively large proportion of such classes as verbs, adverbs, conjunctions, and prepositions from English in Tamil discourse. Nouns account for the largest proportion of mixes as they are relatively free of syntactic restrictions. Table 1 gives details of the distribution of English and mixed words in different grammatical classes based on the taped narration. The table shows that the most frequently mixed word class is the noun, accounting for 38.86% percent of the total mixes. The other word class that is frequently involved in code mixing is the verb, accounting for 17.39% percent of the total switches, to be followed in frequency by the use of adjectives.

**Table 1: Hierarchy of mixed constituents**

Mix type	No. of occurrences	%
Noun	143	38.86
Verb	64	17.39
Adjective	45	12.23
Noun + case	41	11.14
Adverb	41	11.14
Noun + Verbalizer	10	2.72

Verb + Verbalizer	10	2.72
Noun + Clitic	5	1.36
Noun + post position	4	1.09
Conjunction	2	0.54
Pronoun	2	0.54
Preposition	1	0.27
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>368</b>	<b>100</b>

The following is a description of mixed constituents found in the corpus. It should be noted here that the examples given below are extracted from the recorded speech samples, and therefore will serve as examples only. (Phonemic script is not used for some English words for the convenience of the reader).

The sentences below are some samples from the recorded corpus where English or mixed words are used as nouns.

1. Actuaalaa intha storyila eNNaNNaa first vanthu ithu vanthu oru societyiya base paNnuNna **story** maathirithaan irukku.
2. car **breakdown** aayituthu
3. piNNaati **car** varRatha paakkuRaaN.

Some switched verbs occurring in the corpus are: adjust, admit, avoid, cross, feel, help, hit, and move.

1. ivaN vanthu piNNaati thirumpi paaththuttu **adjust** paNnNnaRaththukkaaka he is trying.
2. antha kaar avaN veekamaa **cross** paNnNnuthu.

The most widely switched adjectives in the narration include: unconscious, rash, opposite etc. The English root word is suffixed with a Tamil adjective marker and made to function as an adjective. Tamil has very few inherent adjectives. Instead, adjectives are formed by adding certain suffixes onto nouns or verbs. The most commonly used adjective suffix is -aaN. The following are some samples from the corpus

1. avaN **slowaaN** vegathula thaaN pooyittu irukkaaN.
2. athu oru **calmaa**N roodu thaaN.
3. athu **trafficaa**N roodu kuuda illai.

Amalgamation of the English noun with the Tamil case marker is the next most preferred form of mixing used in the recorded data.

1. athu avaNoota **teacherota** kaar.
2. utaNee ezunthiriccu **journeyai** kaNtiNiyuu paNnRaaN.

In some cases the English adverbs are used, and in some places English root word is used with the Tamil suffix to make it function as an adverb. Adverbs can be made from nouns by adding the suffix -aa.

1. kaaleej varumpoothu **sharply** oru eyit thartti irukkum.
2. avaN kaara **rashly** drive paNnittu poraaN
3. kaarkaaraN **fastaa** fraNtla oovarteek paNnNna pooyituRaaN

The use of English nouns with a Tamil verbalizer as suffix is also found in the data.

1. **skid aaki balance** paNnNna mutiyaama kiizee vizunthituRaaN.
2. piNNaati vanthu kaar **accident** paNnNnittu pooyituRaaN.
3. coo ivaNukku **fear aayi** kiizee vizunthutuRaaN.

English verbs are used with a verbalizer to form compound verbs.

1. ithaNaala antha paiyaN vanthuttu **frighten aaki** avaNukku vazi vitalaam eNRu paarkkuRaaN.

2. ivaN vanthu **overtake paNnNni** pooRa.
3. avaN pooRa vaziyila kaar **repair aaki** avaru cari paNnNnikkittu irukkaaru.

In Tamil there is a class of constituents known as clitics, so-called because they can be suffixed to many different kinds of constituents but can never occur alone (Schiffman, 1999). Such instances of mixing noun with the Clitic were found in the data.

1. antha **view lathan** namma paakkaNum.
2. **carum** pooyittee irukku.
3. entha vitha **trafficum** illaatha rootu.

The data consisted of mixing of the noun with the postposition to a very little extent. The Postpositions in Tamil are presented as equivalent to English prepositions and are suffixes added to the words which they govern. These postpositions are usually nouns or verbs (Arden, 1942).

1. antha kaarkaaraN niNnu vanthu oru **sorrykuuta** keekkala.
2. antha maari **rulesellaam** yaarum kataipitikkaRathu kitaiyaathu.

Insertion of conjunctions like so, and, but etc. is found in the narration of the story by the respondents. Examples of mixing involving conjunctions include the following sentences from the corpus:

1. kiraas paNnNnaNumNu niNaiccu faastaa pooRaaN **but** atipattu rootu caitula vizunthutaaN.
2. kaar paaththittee pooRathaala vizunthutuRaaN **but** antha kaarla irukkiRavar vanthu help paNnNnala.

The percentage of use of pronouns is very less (0.54%).

1. appatiiNRa maathiri **he** is using haaraN.
2. nikkaama athaavathu **he** goes and intha paiyaN **he** falls down

The occurrence of English prepositions is also low (0.27 percent) compared to other word classes.

1. the kaar koos **along** aNntu ivaN kvikkaa thaNna vanthuttu cari oNum atipatala appatiNnu hi is kettink reti tu koo

The recorded text had mixed words, where Tamil affixes were added to English words. The table below shows the mix type preferences of the respondents in the narration of the story. English noun with Tamil case marker is the most preferred category when it comes to mixing. The English noun or verb is also used with a verbalizer or postposition or clitic. In some cases, the English words are used in such a way that they function as nouns, verbs, adverbs or adjectives. The following table gives some examples of mixed words that were found in the narration of the story by the respondents.

**Table 2: List of some mixed words from the corpus**

Mixed Words	Words used to mean	Word class
Calmaana	Calm	Adjective
Interestaa	Interestingly	Adverb
soundu	Sound	Noun
Cycleai	The cycle	N + accusative case
Driverkku	For the driver	N + dative case
Cycleoda	With the cycle	N + instrumental case
Cyclela	On the cycle	N + locative case
Teacheroda	Teacher's	N+ possessive case

Teacher <sup>um</sup>	Even the teacher	N + clitic
Opposite <sup>la</sup>	In the opposite	Adj + locative case
Touch <sup>panni</sup>	Touched	V + verbalizer

## Discussion and Conclusion

The study shows that speakers in Tamilnadu not only speak Tamil and English but also a code mixed variety containing linguistic features of both Tamil and English. The narration showed that the respondents used several English words while narrating in Tamil. The language used by the respondents is the normal day-to-day standard spoken Tamil which was interspersed with English words and phrases. The English words used were single lexical items, phrases, or mixed words with English roots and Tamil inflections. In the contact of two languages, Tamil and English, the following were observed:

- The use of English words when speaking Tamil.
- The application of the word order of Tamil to English sentences. This kind of interference is common in the speech of bilinguals.
- The combination of Tamil and English morphemes, within the word boundary.
- The use of the phonetic and phonological system of Tamil for English words. That is, the English words that have been borrowed have the phonological structure of Tamil words.

This study is based on two typologically different languages. Tamil and English do not have a similar word order. Tamil language has the SOV word order whereas English follows the SVO pattern. The word order differences do not prevent language mixing. The English words are inserted in predominantly Tamil syntactic patterns. It has been revealed that English switched word classes are patterned like the structure of their Tamil counterparts, and occur according to the word order of the Tamil language. In some cases English nouns are followed by Tamil verbalizers to make them behave like verbs. Though the two languages have different grammatical patterns, code mixing takes place very smoothly between these languages as would be the case in languages with a similar typology. Single words are inserted more often than entire clauses.

The present study indicates the preference for nouns to be mixed more frequently than other word classes. The use of English words with Tamil affixes, making them function as verbs, adjectives and adverbs is next in the hierarchy. An intriguing aspect of Tamil-English code mixing is the fact that any English verb, and even some nouns, can be converted into a Tamil verb by following the normal verb tense constructions of Tamil. The English verb *drive* can be transformed into the Tamil '*drive paNnu*' meaning, "to drive".

Code-mixing is a kind of spontaneous behaviour of bilinguals, and most of the time the bilingual is not conscious of the way he/she mixes the two languages. The mixed code is a "natural consequence of languages in contact" (Li, 1998:185). This study shows that the mixed code, called *Tanglish* (Tamil-English mix), is becoming popular among the youngsters. *Tanglish*, used by the youth in day-to-day conversation, has found its way into the media - electronic and print (Kanthimathi, 2007). Mixing is leading to a new hybrid language system. When the grammars of two languages come together, most of the times the grammars of the two languages are not altered but sometimes this interaction leads to the contact of the two grammars, resulting in a new linguistic system. Further studies look into the integration patterns of different language pairs that can give more interesting insights about language mixing.

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