

## **SOME TYPICAL FEATURES OF ASSIMILATION OF ENGLISH BORROWINGS IN JAFFNA TAMIL**

**Dr. V. Suntharesan**

M.Phil in Linguistics, Ph.D in Linguistics

Senior Lecturer

English Language Teaching Centre

University of Jaffna

Sri Lanka

### **Abstract**

Many English words very rapidly find their way into the day-to-day speech of Tamil monolinguals in Jaffna. The names of new objects and practices are pouring in almost daily. In business, industry, financial institutions, recreation, and at home use of English words is very frequent. Being unaware of the origin of the words, Tamil monolinguals believe such words to be part of the Tamil vocabulary and use them with phonological modification. It is true that all the English words are mixed in the speech of monolinguals. There are certain instances which compel speakers to mix foreign words in their speech. The main reason for the use of foreign words is the unavailability of their equivalents in the native language. This article discusses certain features found in the assimilation of English borrowings in the Jaffna Tamil.

Key Words : Language Contact, Borrowing, Assimilation, Bilingualism

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **Language Contact and Borrowing**

The Jaffna Tamil society in Sri Lanka comprises both bilinguals in Tamil and English and Tamil monolinguals. Code switching among bilinguals and borrowing among monolinguals are common features in Jaffna. Monolinguals use a number of borrowings in their day-to-day speech and in writing at home, in social interaction, in education, in religious activities etc. The initial development of bilingualism in Tamil and English in Jaffna is the outcome of English education and civil administrative activities through English medium during the British colonial rule (1796 – 1948) in Sri Lanka. English is still taught as a second language in educational institutions and a considerable part of the administration is carried out in English on this island. As a result, English still continues to be in contact with the national languages Sinhala and Tamil and this language contact situation has led to the presence of several English borrowings in the national languages.

Two or more languages are said to be in contact if they are used alternatively by the same persons. The individuals using the languages are the locus of the contact. Bilingualism is the practice of alternately using two languages and the persons involved are bilinguals. As a result of language contact, there have been instances of deviations from the norms of either language. These deviations occurring in the speech of bilinguals because of their familiarity with more than one language are referred to as interference. The term interference implies the rearrangement of patterns resulting from the infiltration of foreign elements into the highly structured domains of language such as the phonemic system, morphology and syntax and some area of vocabulary. Such transfer from one language into another is called borrowing in general. The amount of interference relies on the amount of differences or similarities between the languages concerned. (Weinreich, 1953).

Extreme similarity or extreme dissimilarity between languages is said to be an unfavourable condition for language interference. The mere contact of two languages is not supposed to lead to a situation in which one language borrows elements from the other language. Two conditions are essential for borrowing to occur. The meaning of the borrowed word should be comprehended by the person intending to adopt that word in his language or he should convincingly assume as if he has comprehended it.

### **Assimilation**

Assimilation is a kind of sound change commonly found in languages. In assimilation, one consonant becomes similar to another depending on the point of articulation or the manner of articulation. The following remarks on assimilation elaborate the notion further.

Perhaps the most common type of conditioned sound change is assimilation, whereby one sound becomes more like a neighbouring one. Obviously this can be considered a simplification of the muscular movements needed to pronounce a given word. Assimilation is a very frequent phenomenon in just about all the languages of the world. In terms of articulatory phonetics, assimilation of consonants usually involves in one or more of the following three ways.

1. Point of articulation
2. Manner of articulation
3. Voicing

(Arlotto, 1972, p.81)

The above features of assimilation are well applicable to assimilated English borrowing in Tamil. The English Bomber and Ounce are borrowings in the Jaffna Tamil and they are pronounced as 'pompər' and 'avuntʃu'.

The above are examples which are based on the point of articulation

The English Paint and Chimney are borrowings in the Jaffna Tamil and are pronounced as 'peintu' and 'cimini'. These assimilations are examples based on the manner of articulation.

### **Levels of Assimilation**

Borrowings may be assimilated either totally or partially. There are borrowings which are used without being assimilated.

The following are examples of English borrowings which have been totally assimilated, partially assimilated and unassimilated in the Jaffna Tamil.

**Total assimilation**

**English**

Bank  
 Kettle

**As borrowings in Jaffna Tamil**

vanki  
 keiθal

The labiodental fricative “f” is realized as ‘p’ in Jaffna since “f” sound is not found in Jaffna Tamil.

**Examples:**

**English**

Coffee  
 Office  
 Father(Rev.)  
 Fail  
 Foreign  
 Free

**Tamil**

kɔ:ppi  
 ɔ ppis  
 pa:θar  
 peil  
 pɔrin  
 piri:

The velar fricative ‘h’ in English is realized in Tamil as ‘k’ in the initial position but has almost similar pronunciation in inter vocal position.

**Examples**

**English**

Hospital  
 Handle  
 Hardware

**Tamil**

kɔspital  
 k æ:ndil  
 ka:dveiar

The palatal affricate [ʃ], the ‘sh’ sound is substituted with [s] in Jaffna Tamil.

**Examples :**

**English**

Shop  
 Ship  
 Shirt  
 Shed  
 Shock  
 Bishop  
 Fashion  
 Mash

**Tamil**

sɔp  
 sip  
 s ə:ttu  
 settu  
 sɔk  
 visap  
 p æ:san  
 m æ:s

Similarly the sound [ʃ] produced by ‘ti’ is substituted by [s] as found in the following examples.

|              |              |
|--------------|--------------|
| Tuition      | tu:san       |
| Station      | isteisæn     |
| Petition     | p ættiisam   |
| Appliication | appilikeisæn |

The alveolar fricative ‘z’ is also pronounced as [s] in Jaffna Tamil.

**Example :**

|                |              |
|----------------|--------------|
| <b>English</b> | <b>Tamil</b> |
| Zip            | sippu        |

The sibilant ‘s’ is generally preceded by a vowel sound in Jaffna Tamil.

**Examples:**

|                |              |
|----------------|--------------|
| <b>English</b> | <b>Tamil</b> |
| Stool          | istū:l       |
| School         | isku:l       |
| Style          | istail       |
| Start          | ista:t       |
| Screw          | iskru:       |

( The above words receive a vowel sound ‘i’ in the initial position. )

**Inter vocal position**

|                |              |
|----------------|--------------|
| <b>English</b> | <b>Tamil</b> |
| Suspender      | susupender   |
| Biscuit        | visukkə:ttu  |

The bilabial stop (voiced) in English is equated with labio dental [v].

**Examples:**

|                |              |
|----------------|--------------|
| <b>English</b> | <b>Tamil</b> |
| Biscuit        | visukkə:θu   |
| Bell           | velittu      |
| Bathroom       | va:θru:m     |
| Bus            | vasu         |

When [b] occurs in the inter vocal and final position, it is replaced by [p] sound in Tamil as in the following examples.

|                |              |
|----------------|--------------|
| <b>English</b> | <b>Tamil</b> |
|----------------|--------------|

|        |        |
|--------|--------|
| Carbon | ca:pan |
| Lab    | læp    |

The velar voiced stop [g] in English is pronounced as velar unvoiced stop [k].

**Examples:**

| <b>English</b> | <b>Tamil</b> |
|----------------|--------------|
| Gate           | keitu        |
| Glass          | kila:su      |
| Garage         | kara:tʃu     |
| Cigarette      | si:kkirattu  |
| Plug           | piɻkku       |
| Jug            | dʒakku       |
| Bag            | væ:kku       |

[g] in final position becomes (k) followed by a vowel sound usually (u) ]

Alveolar fricative [d] in English is realized as [y] in Jaffna Tamil.

**Examples:**

| <b>English</b> | <b>Tamil</b> |
|----------------|--------------|
| Jam            | yæ:m         |
| Jack           | yæ:k         |

[t ], [p], [d] and [g] in English are always followed by a vowel sound [u].

**Examples:**

| <b>English</b> | <b>Tamil</b> |
|----------------|--------------|
| Cement         | si:menθu     |
| Scent          | sentu        |
| Shirt          | sə:ddu       |
| Lamp           | la:mpu       |
| Bulb           | valppu       |
| Cup            | kɻppu        |
| Bag            | væ:kku       |
| Nud            | naddu        |
| Road           | rɔ:ddu       |

In the following examples, [r] in the final position in English is pronounced as [l] in Tamil by most of the monolinguals in Jaffna. This tendency of pronouncing can be explained as follows with the following examples. In Tamil, two forms of the same word like ‘panthal’ and ‘panthar’ (roof of a shed) and ‘sampal’ and ‘sampar’ (ash) are in usage. The familiarity with these dual

forms of the same word may have induced speakers to give such identical sounds to the words ‘carrier’ and ‘barrier’ in English, as shown below.

| <b>English</b> | <b>Tamil</b> |
|----------------|--------------|
| Carrier        | kærial       |
| Barrier        | bærial       |

[t] followed by a consonant in English is dropped in Tamil.

| <b>English</b> | <b>Tamil</b> |
|----------------|--------------|
| Train          | rein         |
| Travel         | rævæl        |
| Traffic        | rævik        |

### **Conclusion**

Most of the English borrowings are used in their assimilated forms among the Tamil monolinguals. Because of the difference between the sound systems of English and Tamil, English borrowings are adapted to the Tamil phonological system and conveniently pronounced. Tamil monolinguals use the assimilated forms of borrowings without knowing that they are of English origin. Borrowings in Tamil have, of course, contributed immensely in expanding the scope of Tamil and enriched the Tamil vocabulary. Pertinent to this, the process of assimilation can be rightly viewed as indispensable and indeed an effective mechanism conveniently but linguistically appropriately adopted by speakers.

### **Work Cited**

Arlotto, A. (1972), *Introduction to historical linguistics*. Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston  
Weinrich, U. (1953), *Languages in contact*. Mouton Publishers, The Hauge, Paris, New York, USA.