Tamil Teaching and Learning Process

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Abstract

‘Tamil’ is one of the classical languages of India and the other one is Sanskrit Language. Tamil is one of the major languages of the Dravidian family of languages. Most of the persons who speak Tamil Language reside in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu, Tamil is also spoken in many parts of the world. Large concentration of Tamil speaking people is located in Sri Lanka, Malaysia, and Singapore, as also in other South Indian states of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, and Kerala and major cities of India. In fact, Tamil speaking people are found in all the time zones of the world. There are more than 74 million people who speak Tamil as their native language. Tamil is one of the few living classical languages and has an unbroken literary tradition of over two millennia. The written language has changed little during this period, with the result that classical literature is as much a part of everyday Tamil as modern literature. Tamil school-children, for example, are still taught the alphabet using the átticúdi, an alphabet rhyme written around the first century A.D. Teaching and learning are related terms. In teaching - learning process, the teacher, the learner, the curriculum and other variables are organized in a systematic way to attain some pre-determined goal. A language to be studied must be the mother tongue or the regional language. This article describes about Tamil, a language that is very easy to learn.

Introduction

Tamil is one of the major languages of southern India. It is spoken principally in the state of Tamil Nadu (formerly Madras), located on the eastern coast and extending down to the southernmost tip of the Indian subcontinent. There are about 60 million Tamil speakers in India. In addition it is spoken by about 4 million people in north-eastern Sri Lanka, about one million in Malaysia, and in smaller colonies in Singapore, and parts of East Africa. Tamil is the oldest and most richly developed of the Dravidian languages. The origin of the alphabet (Tamil script) is uncertain, though it is believed to be about 3,500 years old. "Curry" is a Tamil word that entered the English language. Other Dravidian languages like

Malayalam, Kannada and Telugu have close affinities with Tamil. Tamil also has a substantial classical literature dating back to about the 7th century A.D.

Teaching Learning Process

We are passing a great transition. The old is becoming obsolete and new is still in the process of emergence. The old ways of learning & teaching are found to be too rigid and too out dated. A great opportunity of psychological principle is being truly demanded. It has been urged that the training of the young requires on the part of teacher a deep psychological knowledge. Teaching-learning process is the heart of education. It is the most powerful instrument of Education to bring about desired changes in the students. Teaching learning are related terms. In teaching - learning process, the teacher, the learner, the curriculum and other variables are organized in a systematic way to attain some pre-determined goal. Let us first understand in short about learning, teaching and then teaching-learning relation.

Learning

The learning of our mother tongue languages reinforces our cultural identity, values and roots. It also gives another world-view that complements the perspective of the English-speaking world. Our mother tongue allows us to connect with communities across Asia and the world to speak the language or share the culture. This enables us to strengthen regional and global ties. Teaching and using Indian languages as part of the curriculum for the Indian Diaspora often takes the role and function of heritage learning. However, in the case of the vibrant and zealous Tamil community in Singapore (and Malaysia), Tamil is an official language with an excellent support base from the national governments as well as culture leaders. However as new generations who enter school, impacted by the global trend of using English even for interpersonal communication, people are losing their skills in their mother tongue. Situation calls for a radical review of the existing textbooks, especially the language style adopted, content introduced, classroom activities organized, and the goals of Tamil teaching and learning.

Language Teaching Methods

In India, the 'three-language-formula' was implemented for decades ago in order to bring   the national integration, intra-state, inter-state and international communication effectively.

According to 'three-language-formula', the language teaching has categories as follows:

1. The first language to be studied must be the mother tongue or the regional language.
2. The second language will be some other modern Indian languages or English for Hindi Speaking States, and Hindi or English for non-Hindi speaking States.
3. The third language will be English or a modern Indian language, which is not studied as the second language for both Hindi speaking and non-Hindi speaking States Hence, it is clear that the first language that is, the mother tongue or the regional language should be given importance than that of other two categories.
4. Every child's mother tongue or regional language has to be taught right from the first standard. Unfortunately, even about four decades after the implementation of 'three-language-formula', it is yet to be effectively implemented in true spirit.
5. Despite all the changes in the socio-economic scenario, market pressures and the behavior patter of the Indian Youths, the 'three-language-formula' still remain relevant (NCERT, 2000).

Tamil is one of the traditional languages, which is a root for other Dravidian languages such as Kannada, Telugu and Malayalam. It is considered as a regional language for southern states of India, especially for the people of Tamilnadu state. The Tamil language has its own traditional, Cultural, political and social effects. It has rich literature potentials, which are reflected over the lifestyles of Tamil native speaker. Due to improper implementation of three-language-formula system, the Tamil language teaching is suffering a lot. Further, nowadays, the people of Tamil speakers are spread all over the world. Though several steps have been taken by the federal government and the Tamil language research Institutions, there is a hurdle to improve the quality of Tamil language and the rate of Tamil language acquisition is decreasing. Further, with the present infrastructure, size of the group, availability of teacher, training of teacher etc., it is difficult to achieve the objectives of Tamil language teaching. Since the objectives are multi-dimensional in nature, multiple methods are to be used in an integrated fashion for their achievement.

Learning Spoken Tamil

Like English, the Tamil language contains a myriad of spoken forms. The diversity of dialects is based on geography, social class, and a number of other

factors. It would be far too difficult to cover all the different ways of speaking Tamil. Luckily, the vast majority of spoken Tamil can be derived directly from written Tamil. Every student studies his mother tongue language for as long as possible and to a level he is capable of. We should, however, recognize that not all students have the same natural ability, home background and motivation in learning and using their mother tongue languages. We should, therefore, adopt a differentiated approach to cater to the abilities and backgrounds of our students, and encourage each student to develop the language competency to a level he or she can realistically achieve. Those students who do not already don't know how to speak in grammatically will start by speaking in Tamil. It may sound funny to hear someone speaking in formal Tamil all the time, but it's a great way for the learner to practice using the grammar. Usually the rules for converting grammatical Tamil to spoken Tamil are fairly simple, involving the deletion of certain syllables or changing of sounds. As learners gains more and more speaking experience and listen carefully to how others speak, they will learn how to "translate" the formal, grammatical Tamil to colloquial, spoken Tamil.

Classification

Tamil is a member of the Tamil languages group of languages, along with Irula, Kaikadi, Betta Kurumba, Sholaga, and Yerukula. The Tamil languages are a subgroup of the Tamil-Malayalam languages, which in turn is a subgroup of Tamil-Kodagu languages, a subgroup of Tamil-Kannada-Telugu languages. The Tamil-Kannada-Telugu languages are a subgroup of the Southern branch of the Dravidian language family.

Geographic distribution

Tamil is spoken mainly in Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka. Tamil is also spoken in Singapore, Malaysia and Mauritius.

Learning Tamil

1. University of Pennsylvania's web based courses for learning and teaching Tamil
2. Tamil virtual University has the largest collection of digitized Tamil literary works and web based courses for learning and teaching Tamil
3. Daniel Bell - Learning is modification due to energies of organism and environment impinging on the organism itself.
4. Gates -Learning is modification of behavior through experience.
5. Crow–Crow - Learning involves the acquisition of habits, knowledge and attitude.

6. Ruch-Learning is a process, which brings about changes in the individual way of responding as a result of contact with aspects of environment.
7. Skinner – Learning as acquisition and retention.
8. Encyclopedia of Education Research - Learning refers to growth of interest, knowledge and skills and to transfer these to new situation

Purposeful use of Information and Communication Technologies in Teaching and Learning

It is essential for teachers to use innovative teaching methods which inculcate in students an interest in the Tamil Language. Teachers are not merely facilitators of learning but are also ambassadors of the Tamil culture and heritage. Teachers need to be equipped with innovative practices that will help them enhance their pedagogical repertoire and face the challenges of teaching a generation of learners born into the digital era.

Information and Communication Technology tools are very much a part of the teacher's toolkit. With the purposeful use of Web as an enabling tool, our students can better learn to collaborate, create, and communicate, all of which are essential attributes for the future. Internet opens up new possibilities such as the use of interactive content, assignment of individualized tasks and the provision of different resources and activities to suit the different needs of students. Furthermore, web based method can provide individualized feedback to students for effective learning. We should, therefore, leverage on our students' familiarity with and regular use of computer for mother tongue language learning.

Teachers are also becoming more tech savvy. With Internet, teachers can design learning to be more authentic by providing rich resources to improve listening, speaking, reading and writing skills in an interactive online environment. ICT also allows our teachers to use a wide range of innovative methodologies to engage their students in the learning of mother tongue languages. For example, in the classroom, students use various web tools such as blogs, discussion forums, Twitter, and, Face book. As digital natives, our students are familiar with these tools. This means the teaching-learning process is enhanced.

To remain relevant and adaptable to changing times and needs, we need to learn new skills and further develop our capabilities. It is no different for teachers who must be equipped with relevant and useful resources and training so that they have the necessary skills to improve the teaching and learning process.

For instance, many Tamil Language teachers have been enrolling in training programmes at the Umar Pulavar Tamil Language Centre. They are fully using the professional development opportunities available at the Centre to update their repertoire of strategies and resources. This is commendable. The UPTLC takes on the role of a national professional development centre for Tamil Language teachers. It provides various training programmes in curriculum, pedagogy, assessment and the use of ICT as well as mentorship programmes for new and senior teachers. I strongly encourage Tamil Language teachers to enroll in the various training programme's offered by the UPTLC, so that you will learn to successfully infuse the use of ICT into your teaching and learning approaches and thus make lessons more interesting and engaging for students.

Web Assisted Learning and Teaching of Tamil (WALTT)

This site contains a number of different kinds of teaching materials suitable for studying modern Spoken and Written Tamil with a teacher. The materials are therefore not self-instructional, but could be used for self-instructional purposes by a highly motivated learner, especially if feedback from a competent teacher is available.

Since the focus of these materials is instruction in modern Spoken and Written Tamil, students who are interested in learning classical, medieval or pre-modern Tamil should consult the Tamil Materials here are arranged in order of difficulty, from easy to more difficult. We begin with lessons on Tamil alphabet, making syllables, simple conversational Tamil (spoken) and move to Tamil folk tales (Written; intermediate level) and then on to more complex spoken and written materials. Materials below are designed to teach different *skills*. Tamil is a language with a very different spoken form than its written (literary) form, which is the form, used for most printed matter, literacy, religious texts, etc. The spoken dialect we use is one that is used by most educated people in interaction with other educated Tamilians; it is commonly found in film dialogue and in some other kinds of performance such as in radio plays, live drama, and some types of television broadcasting. Spoken Tamil (ST) is the variety that all Tamilians use to communicate with other speakers in face-to-face interaction; Written Tamil is not used for oral communication, although it does have a reading pronunciation (it can be read unerringly from its written representation) and oral production of it is highly valued in the society. It may be heard in public speaking, incantation of

religious texts and prayers, and in other formal contexts, such as in educational settings, the reading of news in radio and television broadcasting, some kinds of political oratory, and some others.

The skills we are currently able to teach over the web are the following:

1. Spoken Tamil comprehension, i.e. listening. Materials that are specifically Spoken Tamil (rather than Written Tamil) will be marked with the symbol, and whenever materials are given in both ST and WT, we will mark each utterance with the symbols for Spoken and for Written.

2. Written Tamil comprehension, i.e. reading.

3. Written Tamil production, i.e. writing in the literary dialect of Tamil.

4. Introduction to the Tamil Alphabet This module can be used to practice making the various characters that make up the Tamil alphabet.

5. Preliminary Lessons this module provides lessons starting from very basic Tamil sentences to complex sentences gradually introducing all the frequently occurring vocabulary items.

6. Some simple Conversational Exchanges (Beginning level) this module presents mini-lessons at a beginning level in both spoken and written Tamil. The lessons consist of short conversations such as one might hear between two mother-tongue speakers of Tamil.

7. Tense formation in Tamil - Beginning level - It contains a series of multiple choice tests with information on how to make tense forms of Tamil verbs. Tamil verbs are classified into six different groups based on how they form tense. This section can be used to test your knowledge of Tamil tense markers.

8. A Grammar of Spoken Tamil by Harold F. Schiffman This is a reference grammar of Spoken Tamil, with examples given in Tamil script and in transliteration. It is not a pedagogical grammar; it can be useful in looking up matters of grammar about which you might have questions, but it does not provide a step by step program for the acquisition of Tamil grammar, which should instead be done using our pedagogical modules.

9. Tamil - English vocabulary search engine .This is a module which can be used to search for vocabulary items, grammatical material, and other information such as grammatical paradigms of verbs etc.

10. Vocabulary Drill in Beginning Tamil and Enjoy some jokes with pedagogical aids

11. Tell A Tale for Beginning and Intermediate Tamil learners, Learn some of the differences between spoken and written forms of Tamil This module gives a number of contrasting pairs, showing some of the differences between Spoken and Written Tamil.

12. Cloze tests for proficiency in use of Tamil verb forms for Intermediate level students.

13. Indian Folk Tales for reading comprehension (Intermediate level). These short, simple folk tales are in Written Tamil, but because of some of the grammatical forms used, must be considered to belong at a low-intermediate level. Proficiency test is at Intermediate level.

14. Modern Short Stories for reading comprehension. This module will eventually contain a number of modern short stories by Tamil writers, and each will be provided with grammatical notes, a glossary, and some exercises to complete. For now, this module contains one story by Jayakanthan, an important modern writer. He writes in a rather difficult style, but his stories address real-life issues and contain some spoken material in authentic dialect form. You can read the story, which is provided with an English translation, a glossary, and grammatical notes. Complete the exercises, and send them to your teacher. Answer questions based on your comprehension of the story.

Project Madurai

Electronic versions of printed texts (abbreviated as E-texts) of ancient literary works are important pedagogic and scholarly resources. Stored in easily accessible archives, they permit preservation and wider distribution of ancient literary works around the globe through the means of internet. E-texts of literary works also allow quick search for phrases, words, and combinations of words in any literary work. There are many projects currently active world-wide that attempts to put in electronic form ancient literary works.

Project Madurai is an open and voluntary initiative to collect and publish free electronic editions of ancient Tamil literary classics. This means either typing-in or scanning old books and archiving the text in one of the most readily accessible formats ("ETEXTS") for use on all popular computer platforms. All e-texts will be distributed in both web/html and PDF formats.- Distributed through the World

Wide Web servers , anyone located anywhere may download a copy for personal use or read what we publish on the internet, free of charge.

Since its launch in 1998, Project Madurai e-texts are released in Tamil script form as per TSCII (Tamil Script Code for Information Interchange) encoding.

Conclusion

We are really looking forward the dedication and commitment to ensure that the next generation learns and enjoys the Tamil Language. We are also confident of the commitment and desire of all Tamil Language teachers to deliver high quality, engaging and effective lessons.

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