CHAPTER - I

INTRODUCTION

1.0. General

Language permeates human interaction, culture, behaviour and thought. It has been a subject matter for study since time immemorial. In ancient days the focus was mainly on the grammar. Then the scientific study of language started which led to the new field called 'Linguistics'. Linguistics developed rapidly and became widely known in the later half of the twentieth century, increasing an awareness in the study of linguistics interrelating the various disciplines. Linguistic studies were considered incomplete when they were not socially oriented. Grammar may be written with rules of use without any reference to the social functions, but it is the sociolinguistic process which operates on the output of the grammar by selecting appropriate structures in appropriate contexts. Recognizing the importance of this concept, a profound investigation on the linguistic problems in connection with the society started.

Sociolinguistics studies the different facets of the relationship between language and society. It claims that there are strong connections between language and society and also they are interdependable. Sociolinguistics
not only describes the language in a social facet, but also brings out the importance of the social factors in linguistic change. This was firmly accepted by Whitney as

'Speech is not a personal possession, but a social; it belongs not to the individual, but to the member of society (1991:404)'

Bloomfield (1933) and Hermann Paul (1886) established the individualist psychology that considers language as the individual property where sound changes are found within the individual's speech pattern. Following the same tradition, Chomsky's linguistic studies excluded all social variation. Halle (1962) has presented a model of linguistic changes based on the individual models of the speaker - hearer relationship. Though individualist views were found on the main stream of linguistics considerable opposition also raised supporting the study of language in its social context. Meillet (1921) reflects the same as,

"From the fact that language is a social institution, it follows that linguistics is a social science and the only variable to which we can turn to account for linguistic change is social change of
which linguistic variations are only consequences (1921:16-17)".

Later, growing with the importance of social context, many studies were undertaken in the aspect of social values. Bernstein (1964) studied speech in correlation with the socioeconomic factor. He has approved that the restricted code was found in the speech of lower or working class people and elaborated code was found among the upper class people. Linguists, focussing on sociolinguistics, have accepted linguistic variation when the social values affect the linguistic rules, and the transference of social values of a particular group to the linguistic variant they use.

The present sociolinguistic study includes three aspects. Firstly, this study has concentrated on phonology, considering sounds as the basis of language and also beginning of the linguistic analyses, though linguistic variations arise at all levels of language. Secondly, the present study, in view of studying one's speech sounds which are capable of furnishing information about his social background has been approached sociolinguistically. Adults knowing the linguistic variations of social groupings tend to avoid the variants which indicate the social characteristics, but children unknowingly use them in their
speech. The same has been expressed by Bloomfield (1935:29) as,

'Every child that is born into a group acquires these habits of speech and response in the first years of his life'

As a third aspect, the current study concentrates on the speech behaviour of the children studying in the primary school.

1.1. Tamil: a sociolinguistic description

In Tamil Nadu, Tamil has been taught both as first language and second language, in the Tamil medium schools as first language and in the English medium schools as second language.

Tamil language exhibits the phenomenon of diglossia where two varieties of the language namely, literary Tamil and colloquial Tamil co-occur simultaneously. These are known as high variety and low variety or written and spoken varieties also. The high or written variety is learnt in the school whereas the low or spoken variety is used in the normal life. This may be also called formal and non-formal varieties.

The dialects of the language are understood based on different factors, such as social class, region, sex,
education, age, economy, etc. There are ten major social classes in Tamil situation and all these come under Brahmin, Non-Brahmin and Harijan groups (Karunakaran and Sivashanmugam, 1981:58). Regionally, the Tamil speech community is differentiated into five as, Northern, Eastern, Western, Southern and Nanjilnad Tamil dialects or in other terms as Madras Tamil, Coimbatore Tamil, Tirunelveli Tamil, Tanjore Tamil, etc. On the basis of religion Tamil speech community is divided into three as Muslim Tamil, Christian Tamil and Hindu Tamil.

Sex has been used as a social variable in linguistic analyses, since it influences the speech behaviour. The social distance between the male and the female makes such influence. Education has an important part in differentiating the Tamil speech behaviour. Normally there are two groups like literates and illiterates. People with higher education speak one variety of the language and people with lesser education or illiterates speak a variety of the language which is different from the previous dialect.

The economic status of the people constitutes three social groups. They are, high income group, middle income group and low income group. On the basis of age three groups exist as young, middle and old age groups. These are
some of the social factors that decide different social groups.

1.2. Motivation for the study

The characteristic feature of language is its variability. In a society, each individual's role, status and position are different. The individuals who carry similar social identity form a social group and share a common language. In a society, there may be many social groups, who speak the same language. There should be some definite social forces to organize the particular social group and at the same time the same social forces help to differentiate the social group from the other groups. Each social group shows variation in different social aspects like beliefs, customs, religion, social class, economic status, etc. So the social groups, though they speak similar language, use the varieties of language which reflect their social characteristics.

The members of the social group, when they communicate among themselves use the variety of their social group, but in cross communication they use a standard form of the language that is intelligible to all the speakers of the language in the society. The speakers, being adults are able to identify and differentiate the varieties of the
language. In communication, they select the mode of the language depending on the hearer of the system.

A child being a member in any one of the social groups that enters the society acquires a particular social variety. He masters his native language with the social markers attached to it. Like the adults, the child is not able to select the mode of the language depending on the situation. He simply follows the variety of the group, which he belongs to. This conception has led the researcher to propound a sociolinguistic study of variations. The child learns the formal use of the language in the school system. This study is interested, to observe whether the child still speaks the variety of the language or any social features are expressed in the speech behaviour of the child. These concepts persuaded the researcher to undertake a profound investigation on the sociolinguistic study of phonological variables in Tamil learning context at the primary school level.

1.3. Aims of the study

The following are the aims of the present study.

1. To identify the significant social variables from the following social factors.
   a. Age
   b. Sex
c. Social class
d. Economy and
e. Domicile

2. To identify the Tamil phonological variables of the students at primary school level from the following phonological items.
   a. Vowels
   b. Diphthongs
   c. Laterals
   d. Nasalization and
   e. Voice

3. To undertake a brief sonograph study of the speech sounds, so as to identify the variations accurately.

4. To condition the phonological variables with social variables.

5. To describe the uncorrelatable phonological variables.

6. To present a stylistic variation of the speech recorded.

7. To find out the learning problems in relation to pronunciation.

8. To provide a guideline for teaching phonology in the primary schools efficiently.
1.4. Scope

This study takes an opportunity to evaluate the students of the category so far discussed. The children studying in the first three classes of the primary school constitute the universe of the study. From this universe, the informants were selected by applying appropriate sampling strategies. The area of the study is limited to places in and around the Coimbatore city. Three areas were selected as urban, rural and tribal, to establish the areal features of the proposed research. The social background of the tribals and non-tribals are completely different. The present study aims to identify whether the difference in social background is reflected in the pronunciation. The selected five social factors were observed whether they allow phonological variations.

1.5. Review of previous studies

Some of the studies connected to sociolinguistics and sociophonology have been reviewed in this section. Jules Block (1910) was the first scholar to study the Tamil dialects in its social contexts. He classified the sociolects into three types as (a) Brahmin dialect, (b) Non-Brahmin dialect, and (c) Harijan dialect. He has found the preservation of some sounds qualitatively in Brahmin dialects than in the other two. He has described the speech
variations on the basis of social factors, second language interference, and style. He has found out that,

1. The upper class variation of sound change is at the phonetic level and
2. The lower class imitates it inaccurately and produces change on the phonemic level.

Gumperz (1958), Fishman (1964), Labov (1966) and Trudgill (1974) are some of the noted sociolinguists who have worked in this direction. Labov's (1978) work entitled "Sociolinguistic patterns" has dealt with the linguistic variations in the different social facets. He has identified the social motivation of a sound change and the reflection of social processes in linguistic structures. He has studied the language in its social context and has found out the social setting of linguistic change. Ralph Fasold (1984) in his "The sociolinguistics of society" speaks about the social importance of language and the role of language in nationism and nationalism. He has approached multilingualism both as a problem and as a resource.

Roger Fowler and Gunther Kress (1979) in their Language and control have demonstrated the correlation between social groupings and styles of speech. They explain the links between society and language and the role of
society in bringing linguistic difference. William Bright and A.K.Ramanujan (1972) in describing the sociolinguistic variation and language change in Sociolinguistics have brought out the importance of sociolinguistic studies. They have examined the caste dialects of Tamil and Tulu. In Tamil, the vocabulary differences between Brahmin and Non-Brahmin groups are studied. They have also concentrated on phonological and morphological variations.


Karunakaran and Sivashanmugam (1981) in their Study of social dialects in Tamil have studied the social
dialectology and have described the different social parameters bringing speech variation. Balasubramanian (1979) while studying the Nasalization of vowels in colloquial Tamil has brought out the various phonetic environments in which oral vowels are nasalized in Tamil. Nagamma Reddy (1992) has focussed on Acoustic correlates of voicing contrasts in Tamil and Telugu which describes the different surface sound patterns in Tamil and Telugu.

However, the attempts more so far have not been comprehensive and what is more important is that no attempt has been made to study the problem of language variation at the phonetic level in the primary school environment. This study, therefore, fills the gap of sociolinguistically describing the phonological variations attested in the speech behaviour of school children belonging to different social groups. The correlation of phonological variants has been made taking into account not only the social background of the speakers but also other social parameters such as sex, domicile, community and age of the informants.

1.6. Plan of the study

The present study includes seven chapters. They are:

Chapter I - Introduction
Chapter II - Methodology
Chapter III - Tamil phonological structure
Chapter IV - Identification of phonological variables
Chapter V - The correlation of phonological variables with social variables
Chapter VI - The phonological correlates
Chapter VII - Conclusion

I. Introduction

The introductory part of the research report discusses the aim, nature and scope of the study. It focuses on the importance of the study by giving a brief introduction to Linguistics, Sociolinguistics and sociophonology. A clear picture of the motivation behind this study and a sociolinguistic description of the Tamil language and a brief review of the pioneering studies are given in this chapter.

II. Methodology

This chapter gives the research outline in detail. It speaks about the nature of the study and the sampling techniques. The research performance and the research techniques are explained with a brief discussion on research analysis.
III. Tamil Phonological Structure

In this chapter, a detailed description of Tamil phonology has been given. The Tamil phonological structure that existed in the age of Tolkappiyar is given to compare with the modern Tamil Phonological structure. The characteristic features of the phonological elements concentrated for the current research are presented.

IV. Identification of Phonological Variables

The variations that were identified in each phonological element are listed out in this chapter. It identifies the different speech styles, namely, casual, careful, words list, passage reading and minimal pairs of the speech recorded.

V. The correlation of phonological variables with social variables

The phonological variations are correlated with the social variables, that is, the reasons for phonological variations are described in detail based on the social background of the informants.

VI. Phonological correlates

This chapter presents the findings of the study. This exposes the stylistic variations of all sociophonological variables. The results are dealt both statistically and linguistically. The learning problems
based on the present study and in general are discussed with appropriate remedial measures.

VII. Conclusion

A brief report on the findings of the study has been given in this section. A discussion on the results obtained is also presented here. Perspectives for undertaking studies in this direction in the future are also included in this section.