CHAPTER - II

METHODOLOGY

2.0. General

In this chapter, the basic elements of research, the research procedures adopted for this study and a brief discussion on the research design are presented. It also discusses the research problem of the study and the strategies employed to achieve the objectives of the study.

As far the present study is concerned, first the characteristic features of Tamil phonological system were studied. Before getting involved in the research, the problems of the selected area were listed out. A review of the theoretical background related to the problem and the research techniques related to the aim of the study was made. The collection of data and observation of the universe of interest were achieved making use of appropriate techniques. This paved a way to get systematic and reliable sources. After this, the results were correlated with the affecting elements of the concerned universe keeping the above said ideas and theories of 'sociolinguistic' methodology. The current study tries to analyse the speech of the school children.
2.1. Nature of the Universe

The impact of social structure on linguistic structure is not a new discovery in linguistics. It is applicable for Tamil language also. This research is being undertaken to find out the influence of society in general over the speech behaviour of Tamil speakers. The adults, who are not able to identify and recognize the social differences of various groups may or may not avoid consciously or unconsciously the use of those linguistic features which could reveal their social identity when they communicate with the speakers of their own group. But when they communicate with the people other than their group or in a cross community communication, they tend to avoid or minimize the use of linguistic features which would reveal their social identity and use a type of standard language. So, there is a situational difference that controls the revealing of markers of social identity. In the case of children, they are not able to recognize such differences and thus, they expose them somehow in their speech behaviour. That is, a child that entered into and brought up from one group learns the language of that group along with its salient features. In the school, the child unconsciously speaks the language which he or she was using before joining the school. It is easy to recognize the social indicators in the speech of the children. So, for the present study, the
children, that too, those at the primary school level, were taken as the universe of study.

This sociolinguistic study of phonological variations in the context of learning Tamil has taken into account the speech of the children who are at the primary school level and whose native tongue is Tamil. To undertake this research, the urban, rural and tribal areas of Coimbatore district were selected. The speeches of the cited children were recorded, transcribed and were subjected to analyses. Phonological variations were identified and to fulfill the purpose of the study, they were correlated with some physical and social background characteristics of the children. The variables were thoroughly examined before correlation in order to arrive at significant results.

2.2. Pilot survey

After selecting the topic and the universe of the study and prior to the actual research, a pilot survey was conducted to have an idea of the specific area of research and the universe. In the pilot survey, the assumptions made were analysed and their validity tested so as to draw enough preliminary modification in the area of research. For the pilot survey, a questionnaire was first prepared and it included the following features:
1. Pictures meant to elicit description

2. A passage for reading and filling the blanks to test
   a. words and
   b. sentences

In the pilot survey, about 25 students studying in the urban area were selected for obtaining data. Through the analyses of the pilot survey data, the following results emerged out.

1. At class level, some difficulties of pronunciation exist.
2. Fluency of pronunciation among the female speakers tend to show difference.
3. Social class differentiation among the informants is significant.
4. Economic status of the speaker is correlatable with the pronunciation habit of speakers.

The aim, nature and area of the study were further specified, based on the results of the pilot survey. The questionnaire prepared for the pilot survey was restructured and modified by incorporating new aspects. The writing skill test that figured as a component in the pilot survey was deleted in the final survey. There were only acquisition problems in the case of writing skill, which did not serve the purpose of sociolinguistic study of variation. The oral
and reading tests were found to be significant for the study of sociophonological variations. So, the questionnaire was further updated with more concentration on oral and reading tests.

2.3. Sampling

Sampling is an essential aspect of surveying. It is nothing but selecting the universe of the study using certain of sampling procedures. The results drawn from the sample should be applicable for the whole population. So, the sample selected should represent the whole population of the area under study. For the present research, 'dimensional sampling procedure' (Eileen Kane, 1984) was adopted. Dimensional sampling is selecting the sample of the study considering the nature of the research, that is the social characteristics of the informants such as age, sex, social class, or whatever it might be. In this type of sampling, the researcher just selects enough people in each of the different social domains selected for the study.

The aim of the study is to correlate the social variables with the phonological variables. The phonological variables were identified from the recorded speeches of the children, and the social variables were drawn from the social factors that were considered as significant for the phonological variation. The following selected social
factors were found to be effective based on the pilot survey results and the theories related to the subject.

1. Age (class)
2. Sex
3. Social class
4. Economy and
5. Domicile

According to the domicile of the informants, they were classified into three. They are:

1. Urban
2. Rural and
3. Tribal

The social parameter domicile plays a major role in classifying the informants. There were 51 informants drawn from the urban area, 36 informants from the rural area, and again, 36 informants from the tribal area, selected for the study.

Normally, the age norm is understood with various age groups, namely, young age group, middle age group and old age group. But in the present study, it goes with the class levels as,
Class I
Class II and
Class III

The informants from each domicile category are divided into two groups as.
Males and
Females

This classification helps to verify the influence of physiological characteristics over Tamil pronunciation.

Another important social factor that affects the language system seriously and gives a way to sociolinguistic variation is the social class system or caste system. In Tamil society, there are many castes or social classes. It was found difficult in the pilot survey to classify the informants on the basis of caste system. Classifying the forward castes is not difficult, but a classification of the backward and scheduled castes is difficult due to the existence of innumerable sub-divisions in castes. Selecting some specific castes and studying their phonology might delimit the focus of the study. These problems led the researcher to club and classify the different castes into three groups.
The term class has been used in this dissertation to refer to the caste of informants.

Since the present study aims at a description of the impact of social factors on the speech behaviour, it was first conceived that the study should rest on completely monolingual informant data. This helped to avoid the influence of other language features over the speech behaviour of the informants. Due to this conception the informants were basically drawn from Tamil medium schools and care was taken to select students who are Tamil native speakers as informants. Mostly people who are above the lower income group alone send their children to English medium schools while lower income group prefer to send their children to Tamil medium schools. So the researcher could identify only the lower economic group informants. The classification that was followed in the pilot survey as

Higher income group
Middle income group and
Lower income group
was ignored. The table that follows reveals the classification of five social factors related to the sample of the study selected and the number of informants selected in each social category representing the whole of the universe.

**TABLE 2.1**  
**THE SAMPLE OF THE STUDY**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CLASS</th>
<th>SEX</th>
<th>SOCIAL CLASS</th>
<th>ECO. STATUS</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>III</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tribal</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*1 - Class I  
II - Class II  
III - Class III  
M - Male  
F - Female  

**FC - Forward class**  
**BC - Backward class**  
**SC - Scheduled class**  
**HIG - Higher income group**  
**MIG - Middle income group**  
**LIG - Lower income group**

Totally, three schools from the urban area, two schools from the rural area and two schools among the Government Tribal Residential schools were selected for the study. They are the following.
Fig. 1 Sample of the study
1. Urban schools
   a. Ramnagar
   b. Pappanaickanpalayam and
c. Maniakarampalayam
2. Rural schools
   a. Puhalur and
   b. Thattampalayam
3. Tribal schools
   a. Manar and
   b. Melbavi

Some informants were selected from the above schools and the rest of the informants were selected from other areas, where the researcher could find appropriate informants characterised by the social characteristics framed for the study.

2.4. Data elicitation

The data for the sociolinguistic study of phonological variables in Tamil learning context at the primary school level were collected through the field work, using the following research techniques:

1. Questionnaire method
2. Interview method
3. Participant observation method and
4. Written sources (reference method)
The research techniques used are discussed in detail in the following section of the present chapter. The data collected through the adoption of different techniques were recorded by a tape recorder. To avoid the over-consciousness of the informants during the recording of their speech, the researcher had to first make the informants to feel ease and comfort. The informants were encouraged to speak fluently by playing back their speeches. This helped to get natural speech. The informants were called individually and their responses were recorded. The data collected outside the classroom, when the students were playing, were transcribed immediately instead of using tape recorder. Then in the process of analyses, similar variations were noted down and grouped. After grouping the variations, the reasons were found out for such variations and it is understood that the reasons were basically coming from the social background of the informants. Grouping the variations and connecting them with the social factors fall under the aspect of sociolinguistic correlation in the present research. As a concluding step of the research, the researcher has attempted to give some remedial measures to avoid or minimize the phonological variations found in the speech of the primary school children. The above discussed aspects of the research clearly depict the research mode of the present study.
2.5. The Research Techniques

The term research technique broadly subsumes the procedures or instruments used for data elicitation. Testing methods decide the type of research technique used to elicit the data. The present study includes the following testing methods.

Diagram 2.1. THE TYPES OF TESTING

There are several research techniques for gathering information in a particular selected topic. The research techniques already discussed for the current research to elicit data are:

1. Questionnaires
2. Interview
3. Participant observation
4. Written sources (reference method)
The first three techniques were adopted during the field work conducted for the study and the fourth technique was adopted while consulting the formal documents that were related to the subject. The data collected through the field work were treated as those drawn from 'primary sources' and the data obtained from formal documents were treated as from 'secondary sources'. For both oral and reading tests the same techniques were used with required modifications.

2.5.1. Questionnaires

Two types of questionnaires were administered for eliciting data from the informants. One was meant for understanding the social background of the informants and the other one was for eliciting the phonological data from the speeches of the informants eventually leading to the detection of the phonological variables. The questionnaire that enables eliciting the social information of the informants was not given to the informants; rather through elicitation schedules, the researcher herself got filled the questionnaire information. This questionnaire furnishes the following particulars.

1. The class in which the students (test subjects) study
2. Sex status of the informants
3. Social class/ caste the informant belongs to
4. The economic status of the informant
5. The area in which he or she lives
6. Parents' education and occupation
7. Migration particulars of informants

In the above, the first five items correspond to the five social factors taken for the study. The sixth item confirms the economic status of the informant and at the same time, elicits in detail, whether the informants have the facility of enriching their educational achievements through their parents. The seventh item is meant for getting information about their ability in using language other than Tamil or the dialectal features of Tamil since, in the Tamil curriculum situation children having Tamil or other minority and tribal languages as their mother tongue learn Tamil at school.

The second type of questionnaire was used to test the phonological system of the informants. The five phonological items selected for research purpose are:

1. Vowels
2. Diphthongs
3. Laterals
4. Nasalization and
5. Voice
They are particularly selected because each of these items create problems while learning Tamil. Since each item required a thorough testing, separate questionnaires were prepared. The researcher wanted to test the above in all types of speech styles and hence questionnaires were prepared with due incorporation of the different contexts of the informants' speech behaviour. Each questionnaire included the following:

1. Pictures to be described
2. A list of words that contain the sounds concentrated for the study in all the positions
3. A passage to be read
4. A list of words to be read as minimal pairs

Of all the phonological items, vowels, laterals and nasalization have included all the above test items, whereas, the diphthongs and voice have excluded the fourth test item. Flash cards were used to test each and every picture, word or passage. The test items have occurred in the following pattern of speech styles.

1. Casual speech - This occurs in the casual conversation between the researcher and the informants, and also between the informants.
2. Careful speech - This occurs in the explanation given by informants about the persons, objects or actions on seeing the respective pictures as cue.

3. Word list reading - Reading a list of words selected in such a way so as to include the sounds to be tested at all the positions.

4. Passage reading - This strategy is adopted to bring out the pronunciation of sounds in a continuous flow of speech.

5. Minimal pairs reciting - This speech style is adopted to elicit the pronunciation of a list of words that contains different phonemes in identical environment.

The casual speech style of the informants was obtained mostly through interviews and partly through observations. The conversations were mostly about the informants' likes, dislikes, habits, their day-to-day activities, etc. The children also narrated stories which they came to know from the text books, cinema and from elders or they created their own stories out of their imagination. Casually the social background of the children was also obtained by allowing the children to be free to
talk whatever of interest to them. The casual speech behaviour observed in this study was used as a data reflecting all the phonological features. The other test items differed in accordance with the phonological category concerned.

The careful speech style was obtained through the use of some cue pictures that allowed the informants to describe them. For getting data concerned with each phonological category, different sets of pictures were used. The children were expected to pronounce the sounds of the words related to the picture word while describing the pictures. Also a list of words and a passage were given to the children to read out aloud after instructing them to pronounce the sounds in a continuous flow form. These tasks were given with an intention to test the difference between the pronunciation of sounds occurring in isolation and within a passage where the informant is pushed to pronounce the sound in between many sounds. The minimal pairs were given in order to make the children pay more attention and also to make the children get confused with different phonemes in identical environments.

To test the aims of the study with the above characteristic features, relevant questionnaires were appropriately prepared and used.
2.5.2. Interview

Interviewing the informants could be both formal and informal and also at times structured and unstructured. The technique adopted for the present research was informal, unstructured interview. The purpose of using this technique was to have a more casual way of speech and to compare with the other type of speech styles. In this technique, the informants were orally tested and left free to talk about their family and any subject of their interest. The interview technique brings forth three types of speech, namely,

1. Conversation
2. Short speech and
3. Questions

A conversation with the informants about their school or home, a short story and some questions to recognize their social background were incorporated in the interview. The questions asked in the interview were not predetermined. It was very difficult for the researcher first to bring a casual climate while interviewing the informants. The children when they were suddenly exposed to the researcher, became very formal and cautious. To make them feel free, the researcher had to speak to children in a way as they converse among themselves. With these
approaches, the researcher could pursue the interview successfully.

2.5.3. Participant observation method

Observation is one of the useful techniques used in sociolinguistic surveys. The informants were observed for identifying their pronunciation while they talk to their friends, teachers or to the researcher and also when they play. This technique helped to observe the fluency and quality of the sounds used in a natural way. The researcher was a participant in this mode of data elicitation. The data obtained through this technique served as a reference to cross-check the data of the informants which were collected in other ways. This technique included the following details:

1. Observation of the use of selected sounds under study.
2. Observation of informants without creating a sense of being observed.
3. Recording the observed sounds with the help of mechanical aids or the written form by way of transcribing the particular sound or word in a phonemic or phonetic transcription. Sometimes, it was difficult for some children to speak freely when their speeches were recorded. In that case, written mode of recording the sounds was followed.
2.6. Analyses

Analysis is a process of experimenting with the data and synthesizing the results according to the subject matter of the study. For the present research, first the speeches of the informants were transcribed. For the transcription both the broad and narrow transcription procedures were used wherever they were found necessary. Then similar pronunciations were identified and labeled as variables. For the present study, 'bivariate analyses' was followed. It means analyses of the relationship between two variables, - the social and the phonological variables. This kind of analyses associate, and correlate the variables identified and follow the methods given below to analyse and present the results of the analyses.

1. Sociolinguistic method
2. Statistical method
3. Structural linguistics method and
4. Comparative method

The correlation of social structure and linguistic structure served the purpose of sociolinguistic study. In this, the selected five social factors were thoroughly studied and the affecting factors were considered as variables. Also significant phonological variations were brought out from the speech recorded. These two kinds of
variables were associated to substantiate the aim of the study. Statistical measures were used to have a quantitative analyses. This helped in supporting and valuing the results more evidently and accurately. As a part of this research, the Tamil phonological structure is discussed in the following chapter. The phonological changes were correlated with the social background of the informants and all the subgroups within the social factors were differentiated within each factor. These methods of analyses helped to bring out the results successfully to meet the goals set in the field of inquiry. To conclude this part of the research, the following table is given as a check list that briefs out the methodology of the present study.
## Diagram No.2.2. THE RESEARCH DESIGN

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research outline</th>
<th>Research performance</th>
<th>Research techniques</th>
<th>Research analyses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nature of the study</td>
<td>Pilot survey</td>
<td>Testing methods</td>
<td>Bivariate analyses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modification of the goals</td>
<td>Oral</td>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>Research methods</td>
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