1. Tamil diglossia

If a language has a written tradition all the changes which take place in the ordinary speech are not accepted in the written language. The written language is formally learned in the school and so it is more homogenous than the spoken language. The variations found in the speech within a linguistic community emerge into different dialects. The existence of a written variety and spoken dialect varieties may lead to the development of diglossia if the difference between them become pronounced and the domains of their use are well defined.

Diglossia is thus a linguistic variation where a language has two distinct varieties of which one is high or formal or literary and the other is low or informal or colloquial speech which might be diverse. The diglossic variation is a stable one in that the use of formal variety is not allowed in the informal situations and the informal varieties are not allowed to use in the formal situations, and in that the distinction is maintained for a long period in the history of the language. The formal variety is used by the educated speakers of a speech community. It is an additional variety mastered by them. Since the formal variety is
used to write literature and is learned in the school, it is prestigious. Thus Ferguson (1959) defines diglossia as "a relatively stable language situation in which, in addition to the primary dialects of the language (which may include a standard or regional standard) there is a very divergent highly codified (often grammatically more complex) superposed variety, the vehicle of a large and respected body of written literature, either an earlier period or of another speech community, which is learned largely by formal education and is used for most written and formal spoken purposes but is not used by any sector of the community for ordinary conversation."

Though most languages have more than one variety all the languages do not develop diglossia. When the differences between written or formal variety and spoken or informal variety are minimal they are called style differences rather than diglossic differences. There are also other differences between style and diglossic varieties. The formal variety and the informal variety in diglossia may each have different styles of its own.

History of diglossia

It is possible to trace the existence of variation in Tamil from the earliest period in the
The historical evidence does not give a clear idea whether there was diglossia in Tamil or not but it is possible to come to a conclusion on the basis of available evidence that Tamil had two different styles namely the literary style and colloquial style from the earliest period. The grammatical literature refer to the colloquial forms and the inscriptions have used them and to a great extent literary works have also used them. For example, the earliest grammatical work in Tamil, Tolkappiyam mentions the terms varakku 'colloquial language' and ceyyul 'literary language' and also mentions the parts where the speech was closer to the literary language and the parts where the speech was deviant from it. The terms such as centamirnā:tu 'the country of standard Tamil' and koṭuntamirnā:tu 'the country of deviant Tamil' show the existence of more than one style in the use of Tamil even two thousand years ago. The earliest literary work of Tamil, Purāna: nu:ru has dialectal forms such as vayanku < varanku 'to give'; koļiyu:r < ko:riyu:r 'name of a place' (Zvelebil: 1964). Some of the poems from Purāna:nu:ru and kalittokai which are more than eighteen centuries old have the sentence patterns of colloquial speech (Varadarajan: 1964). It shows the existence of informal speech before two thousand years. Dialect words used as
ticaiccal 'the speech of different regions' by Tolka:ppiyam. According to commentators the Tamil land was divided into twelve dialect regions as follows:

1. Aruva:vaṭatalai na:ṭu
2. Mala:ṭu
3. Aruva: na:ṭu
4. Punal na:ṭu
5. Panti na:ṭu
6. Tenpanti na:ṭu
7. Ve:na:ṭu
8. Kutta na:ṭu
9. Kuṭana:ṭu
10. Kataka: na:ṭu
11. ci:ta na:ṭu and

Cilappatikaram of fifth century A.D. uses dialect forms such as cirumikal 'young girls', teri to separate, pani 'fever' etc. (Sethupillai: 1974). This literary work mentions dialect areas such as malaina:ṭu and kuṭana:ṭu.

There is also inscriptionsal evidence to show the existence of variations in Tamil. Inscriptions are available in Tamil from third century B.C. and they show
the existence of colloquial speech. According to Veluppillai (1974) there were three kinds of variations in Tamil viz. geographical, stylistic and social. Geographical variations coincided with the political boundaries of the Pallava and Pandya kingdoms. These two kingdoms used different script versions of the Tamil for writing the inscriptions; the Pandya kingdom used Vatteruttu and the Pallava kingdom used Grantha.

The language used in most of the inscriptions in the Pandya kingdom was closer to the literary Tamil and the one used in the inscriptions in the Pallava kingdom was closer to colloquial Tamil. According to Veluppillai, the use of different scripts may be an attempt to maintain the differences in the styles.

According to Veluppillai, the South Indian Brahmins lived in exclusive villages called brahmadēya or agrahāra and the non-Brahmins lived in separate localities called u:r. A vast majority of inscriptions are about the Brahmins and their villages and Sabhas. So he assumes that the dialect differences might have been there on the basis of the social division. Zvelebil, contends as referred by Veluppillai that the dichotomy between Brahmin and non-Brahmin speech variation in Tamil is fundamental and basic. Brahmin dialect used the
Sanskrit loans without assimilation but the non-Brahmin dialect used them as assimilated. The use of Grantha script was necessitated to write the unassimilated Sanskrit loans. The following are some of the examples of unassimilated Sanskrit loans: Bhumi, Bho:gi, Madhya:na, Prati, Samvatsara, de:va kha:tam. The following are examples of fully or partially assimilated loans: Mahesvarar, Kausikan, Sabhaiy:o:m, Brahmanan, and Paramesvararkku. Panneerselvam (1968) after comparing the language of the inscriptions and literature of the seventh, eighth and ninth centuries, concludes that inscriptions language accepted phonemes and phoneme sequences exclusive to Sanskrit without assimilation whereas the literary language assimilated them. Some of the phonological mergers such as [r] and [l] into [l] in colloquial Tamil are found in the eighth century inscriptions. This is an evidence for the existence of colloquial Tamil since these phonological mergers were not allowed in literary Tamil. The following illustrations from inscriptions of eighth and ninth centuries A.D. (Zvelebil: 1964) assert the existence of informal Tamil. The forms to the right of the arrow are literary and to left are colloquial and are found in inscriptions.

konole < ko:no:lai 'order of the king'
Variations in Formal Tamil

It was shown above that two varieties of Tamil namely Formal and Informal Tamil existed from the earliest period of the history of the Tamil language. Coming to modern Tamil, each variety has further variations. The Formal Tamil has two styles namely the pedantic and the popular style. Informal Tamil has many dialects as discussed below. The popular style of the Formal Tamil draws its lexical items from the Informal Tamil but with the phonology of written Tamil. The novelists however write the informal words closer to their pronunciations in conversations between the characters.
Variations in Informal Tamil

The informal Tamil has geographical as well as social variations besides the standard spoken Tamil. The standard spoken Tamil will be discussed later. There are four regional dialects in the present informal Tamil of Tamilnadu (Zvelebil: 1964; Varma and Saktivel: 1976). They are 1. Northern dialect, 2. Eastern dialect, 3. Western dialect and 4. Southern dialect. The northern dialect is spoken in the districts of North Arcot, Chinelpet and Madras; the Eastern dialect in the districts of Tanjore, South Arcot and Trichy; the Western dialect in the districts of Salem, Darmapuri, Nilgiri and Coimbatore; and the Southern dialect in the districts of Madurai, Ramanathapuram, Tirunelveli and Kanyakumari.

The Southern dialect particularly Kanyakumari as it is spoken maintains the difference between the alveolar trill \([r]\) and alveolar flap \([r]\) whereas the other dialects have lost it. All the other dialects have only one \([r]\), the alveolar flap. The Southern dialect as spoken in Tirunelveli has \([t]\) as the present tense marker as in collu-t-a:n 'says (he)' which is not found in any other dialect. The Southern and Western dialects have lost the contrast between \([r]\), the
retroflex non-lateral continuant and \[ l \] the retroflex lateral and both merged into \[ \ell \]. The Northern dialect also has lost \[ r \] and it is merged with \[ y \] and \[ s \]. The Eastern dialect retains \[ r \].

Social variation.

Some authors have said that there are three distinct social dialects in Tamil, namely the dialects of Brahmin, Non-Brahmin and Harijan. According to another author, 'the barrier between Brahmin Tamil and Non-Brahmin Tamil has been retained and in some places it is greater but the barrier between Non-Brahmin and Harijan has become lesser due to the lose of the characteristic features of the Harijan Tamil' (Ezelebil: 1964). Since no complete dialect survey of Tamil has been undertaken, it is not possible to say anything definite about this. It can be said with measurable assurance that only the Brahmin dialect has certain features which are found among all Brahmins in all regions and only among them.

Standard spoken Tamil

"The spoken language is necessarily split into local dialects; that no spoken standard has appeared yet in Tamilnadu; that the future standard speech of the
Tamils will probably be based on the so-called Pandit style - that is the style spoken by Tamil Pandits and teachers in schools and colleges which is almost quite homogenous, which, however, differs slightly from the uniform standard literary Tamil, and which is the norm and goal of all educated Tamil speakers, has prestige, may be even termed "Standard spoken language" but is not used for informal conversation at home and among friends. (Zvelebil: 1964). This is the view of V.I.Subramoniam. Andronov's opinion on the contrary, as referred in Zvelebil (1964) is that a colloquial standard has been fairly well developed in Tamil, is being spoken by a large portion of the educated and semi-educated population, and may be described in grammar and vocabulary as a complete system. Zvelebil gives his opinion about the standard spoken Tamil after denying the above mentioned two opinions. "It seems that a common colloquial language, based on the local forms of speech system in the Eastern areas of Tamilnadu and in Madras, is being developed towards a standard. It is spoken today mainly by the educated strata of middle-class urban population, notably by the intelligentsia of such cities as Madras, Tiruchi, Madurai and other big Tamil towns. It is a mixed variety, not quite
uniform - since not yet subject to any conscious written normalization - based, as already said, upon the Eastern and Northern dialects and in many respect different from the written literary language."

It may be safely said that the emergence of the standard spoken Tamil is in the process of making. The informal Tamil compared in this study with the formal Tamil. Formal Tamil is one approximate to that spoken by the author in inter-dialect group situation; but there might be some traces of the author's home dialect, viz., the South Arcot Harijan dialect.