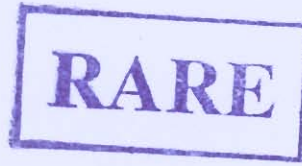# LINGUISTIC CONSTRAINTS - A SOCIOLINGUISTIC STUDY ON TAMIL - ENGLISH MIXED DISCOURSE AMONG THE JAFFNA TAMILS

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Submitted by

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ABSTRACT

In bilingual and multilingual societies, there are usually at least two interacting language groups, each representing different cultural and linguistic features. Sri Lanka is a multilingual country where there is a tendency of mixing two languages as a communicative strategy used by the speakers. It has been observed that mixing of indigenous languages - Sinhala and Tamil and English is a common speech behaviour which occurs in the discourse of educated bilinguals in Sri Lanka. There have been several studies on sociolinguistic, structural linguistic and psycholinguistic aspects of code-mixing in different countries. In recent years, researchers have increasingly focused on the linguistic constraints on code-mixing.

The aim of this study is to investigate the rules and constraints of code-mixing (CM) in Tamil-English mixed language data. The focus of the present study of Tamil-English mixed discourse of educated urban bilinguals in Jaffna, Sri Lanka is of two fold. First, from a sociolinguistic point of view, language mixing originates in response to social motivations, and social factors which cannot be ignored in any analysis. Second, from a syntactic point of view, it is proposed that code-mixing is governed by a host code/guest code principle. This principle says that in a code-mixed discourse involving languages L1 and L2, where L1 is the host code and L2 is the guest code, the morphosyntactic rules of L2 must conform to the morphosyntactic rules of L1, the language of the discourse. In order to determine the sociolinguistic factors which contribute to the development of Tamil-English CM and the rules that govern Tamil-English CM and possible syntactic constraints, the researcher involved the qualitative method of analysis. The present study drew upon data collected from sociolinguistic questionnaire, interview, observation and a recorded spontaneous conversation between bilinguals in a language contact situation in which the two languages are syntactically very different from each other, namely, Tamil and English. The study addresses the questions whether there are sociolinguistic factors which trigger Tamil-English code-mixed speech and whether there are syntactic constraints on Tamil-English CM. The researcher has examined sociolinguistic and linguistic aspects of code-mixing and found that there are factors such as demographic, attitudinal, relationship of interlocutors and language choice and domains which contribute to code-mixed speech and code-mixing is indeed a rule governed phenomenon, that is, there are constraints that govern where in a sentence a code-mix can occur and where it cannot occur.

(Code-mixing, bilingualism, sociolinguistic factors, linguistic constraints, rule governed, morphosyntactic rules)