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# Rewriting the past and reimagining the future:

## The social life of a Tamil heritage language industry

**ABSTRACT**

Globally circulating discourses associated with heritage language industries often promote temporally dichotomous views of spoken and written languages that deny coeval status to linguistic minorities. In the multilingual city of Montreal, Quebec, where Sri Lankan refugees work to preserve a classicalist style of Written Tamil and Indian immigrants work to revitalize a modernist style of Spoken Tamil, this division of labor is undermined by elders and youth who, in mixing colloquial and literary styles of Tamil, French, and English, reframe curricular and nationalist discourses of language loss and degeneration into more empowering narratives of developmental progress and ethnolinguistic identification. [*heritage language industry, temporality, urban multilingualism, globalization, Tamil diaspora, Montreal*]

everal competing and complementary discourses about "heritage language" circulating throughout the world have affected popular understandings of cultural and linguistic change over the past few decades. The most global, deriving from UNESCO's notion of "intangible heritage," designates certain oral folkloric traditions as requiring urgent "preservation" and "revitalization" to ensure their future survival. More often than not, these humanitarian efforts deny coeval status to the verbal repertoires of "timeless" (usually indigenous and rural) peoples and literacy practices of "modernizing" liberal institutions (UNESCO 2011a, 2011b).[1] Also popular among diasporic and migrant peoples are discourses depicting second- and third-generation descendants as progressively incompetent in either spoken or written languages of their ancestors. In this case, pedagogical initiatives to teach "ancestral" or "heritage" languages to minority children de-emphasize lifelong processes of language learning that occur simultaneously among youth and elders alike. Complementing both discourses are nationalist policies that further designate local vernaculars as "classical," "international," or "official" languages. Some of these policies reify dynamic "historical" processes of language contact as static "historicized" objects of sociolinguistic variation, whereas others resignify sociolinguistic variation as socioeconomic and moral distinctions between speakers of purist "standard" languages and corrupted "nonstandard" languages. Regardless of their differences, collectively such discourses and policies entail a single "representational economy" (Keane 2003) based on the common temporal characterization of literary languages as timeless and enduring and colloquial languages as evolving and evanescent. Documenting and teaching heritage languages thus flattens the social life of minority languages and masks the reproduction of sociolinguistic inequalities by promoting dichotomous views of spoken and written language.

In this article, I investigate how ideologies of temporal relationships between spoken and written language are institutionally and interactively negotiated through nationalist policies and diasporic projects to preserve and

revitalize the use of minority languages in urban, multilingual contexts. Specifically, I focus on how multiple generational and migrant cohorts of Indian Tamils and Sri Lankan Tamils living in Montreal, Quebec, emphasize certain grammatical and pragmatic contrasts between colloquial and literary languages to rewrite the past and reimagine the future of this rapidly diversifying diaspora. Drawing on ethnographic and linguistic research conducted at various schools, temples, and other sites of Tamil language instruction from 2004 to 2006,[2] I reveal that, whereas curricular discourses promote a dichotomous view of Spoken Tamil and Written Tamil as the temporally and grammatically distinct heritage languages of Indians and Sri Lankans respectively, teachers and students regularly mix colloquial and literary styles of Tamil, as well as French and English, to reframe nationalist and curricular discourses of language loss and degeneration into more empowering narratives of ethnolinguistic identification and developmental progress. Understanding how ethnic minorities learn to enact social change by speaking, writing, and identifying with a heritage language is especially relevant in the case of Montreal Quebec, where accelerating rates of immigration from nonfrancophone countries are currently challenging the reproduction of the dominant linguistic nationalist regime.

Tamil, with a vast literary history that spans more than 2,000 years and diverse verbal repertoires that span multiple continents, is a rich semiotic resource for investigating how notions of linguistic and cultural heritage are discursively constructed with broad semiotic appeal. Since precolonial times, Tamil-speaking societies in South Asia have endorsed the idea that written forms of literary Tamil are older than vernacular styles of colloquial Tamil because of their grammatical and stylistic similarities with South Indian classical literature of the Sangam period (300 B.C.E. to 100 C.E.). Colonial philologists and modern linguists have reinforced this belief by further categorizing Tamil as a diglossic language. According to this functionalist schema, purist styles of literary Tamil or Written Tamil (*centamil̲* or *eluttutamil̲*) are generally used in formal contexts and impure styles of colloquial Tamil or Spoken Tamil (*koṭuntamil̲* or *pēccutamil̲*) in informal contexts (Annamalai and Steever 1998; Britto 1986; Pillai 1965). When the Indian government officially declared Tamil a "classical language" in 2004, linguists from India, France, Germany, and the United States collectively petitioned UNESCO to establish a central library for storing rare collections of palm-leaf and paper manuscripts written in classical Tamil (UNESCO 2010).[3] Upon hearing the news, Indians and Sri Lankans living in Montreal rejoiced in the assured future posterity of Tamil as a literary language even as they continued to struggle with its ongoing disappearance from their children's verbal and written repertoires. Working in collaboration with government officials since 1998 to "preserve" the use of literary, or Written, Tamil among descendants of Sri Lankan refugees

and "revitalize" the use of colloquial, or Spoken, Tamil among descendants of Indian immigrants, local diaspora leaders have devised a division of language labor unique to Montreal. In no other site of the Tamil-speaking diaspora, including nearby Toronto, do speakers interpret grammatical and pragmatic contrasts between Spoken Tamil and Written Tamil as emblematic of their ethnonational identities as do residents of Montreal.[4]

Unfortunately, most studies of heritage language education ignore these crucial ideological dimensions in explaining how children learn to identify with a minority language as reified heritage. Notable exceptions include Barbra Meek's (2010) study of language revitalization in the Canadian Yukon, where cultural values of respect are shown to have varying impact on children's lifelong acquisition of pragmatic and grammatical competence in Kaska, as well as Patrick Eisenlohr's (2006) study of "ancestral languages" in Mauritius, where local and transnational institutions are found to collaboratively regiment the language loyalties of different ethnoreligious groups by teaching children to speak in purified "ancestral languages." Among other contributions, these studies reveal how temporal narratives of cultural progress or moral degeneration are often implicit in diasporic projects and nationalist policies that fund heritage language education programs. Along a different vein, Miyako Inoue's (2004) work on gendered language suggests that discursive analyses of temporal narratives can more broadly elucidate mechanisms of social reproduction and change. She analyzes how 19th- and 20th-century Japanese nationalist narratives, in contrasting the past use of an idealized, purist women's language with the present-day use of vulgar women's speech, allow for periodic reassertions of patriarchal dominance following rapid transformations of gender relations. Similarly, in contemporary Montreal, where a growing multiethnic and multilingual population stands poised to replace a shrinking majority francophone population, temporal narratives depicting heritage languages as purist artifacts or corrupted vernaculars permit nationalist leaders to de-emphasize the cultural and linguistic contributions of ethnic minorities to Québécois society. However because in the case of Montreal government officials and diaspora leaders collaboratively fund most heritage language education programs, it is likely that teachers and students have significant agency in deciding whether to accept or reject any essentialist ideas and moral values associated with their heritage language.[5]

The mass production of pedagogical resources for differentiated Indian and Sri Lankan Tamil markets in Canada and abroad also bespeaks a highly organized and profitable industry. This article, which focuses on the "allocation of resources, the coordination of production, and the distribution of goods and services" (Irvine 1989:249) pertaining to Montreal's Tamil heritage language industry, contributes to previous anthropological writings on language and

political economy by examining how verbal practices, discursive skills, linguistic codes, and electronic media function as economic resources in organizing the social division of labor, facilitating the exchange of goods, and integrating producers into commodity markets (Eisenlohr 2004; Gal 1987, 1989; Heller 2003; Irvine 1989; Keane 1994, 2003). Although recent ethnographic studies of heritage tourism industries have demonstrated how cultural and linguistic resources are objectified through neoliberal policies and practices (Boudreau and White 2004; Brumann 2009; Bunten 2008; Jackson and Ramírez 2009; Kockelman 2006), I argue that additional attention must be paid to how heritage artifacts are used in everyday life to document ongoing significations in their political and economic value. I describe three such moments of resignification in the social life of a Tamil heritage language industry, starting with how Québécois separatists first conceptualized the role of heritage languages in majority francophone Montreal. I then examine how Indian and Sri Lankan diaspora leaders worked to differentiate the form and function of their heritage languages for an ethnonationally segregated market. Finally, I reveal how elders and youth are interactively renegotiating the value of speaking and writing heritage languages in an increasingly multilingual and globalizing society.

## Politics of ethnolinguistic identity in Quebec

The city of Montreal is internationally renowned for its linguistic diversity and nationalist politics. More residents there speak three or more languages than do residents of any other Canadian city. Also, residents will often publicly comment on their interlocutors' speech patterns to speculate about differences in ethnic ancestry, regional origin, social status, and political affiliation. Even minute changes in linguistic norms are widely debated for their potential impact on the city's delicate balance of power. Until recently, English Canadians, French Canadians, and ethnic minorities could be neatly categorized into three distinct sociolinguistic groups—"anglophones," "francophones," and "allophones"—with predictably profederalist (anglophones and allophones) and pronationalist (francophones) allegiances (Béland 1999; Jedwab 1996; Lemco 1992).[6] By the 21st century, however, the increasingly audible presence of francophones speaking English, anglophones speaking French, and allophones speaking multiple languages had disrupted these politically entrenched categories (Juteau 2000; Lamarre and Dagenais 2004; Lamarre et al. 2002; Piché 2002). Nowadays, as residents pay less attention to which languages interlocutors speak and more attention to how interlocutors use multiple languages to assert political stances and construct social identities (Blad and Couton 2009; Sarkar and Winer 2006), new categories of ethno-

linguistic and racial identity are emerging to distinguish between speakers of majority and minority languages.

The impetus for these ongoing demographic and political changes can be traced to specific moments in the linguistic nationalist movement of the mid- to late 20th century. Historians generally credit the Quiet Revolution of the 1960s and 1970s with introducing a new linguistic nationalist regime to Quebec that transformed the province from a rural and Catholic to an urban and secular, French-speaking society. Soon after ousting the Catholic Church from political power, secular nationalist leaders sought to replace religion with language as the defining symbol of Québécois identity (Handler 1988). In 1977 a newly elected proseparatist government led by the Parti Québécois (PQ) passed the Charter of the French Language (Bill 101) to declare French the official language of Quebec.[7] This law also mandated that immigrant children, most of whom had previously favored attending English-medium public schools, henceforth attend only French-medium public schools.[8] Minority voters outraged by their newfound lack of school choice were somewhat appeased by the subsequent decision of the Quebec Ministry of Education, Leisure, and Sports' (Ministère de l'Éducation, de Loisir et du Sport du Québec) to establish a new state-funded heritage language program, locally known as the PELO, or Programme d'enseignement des langues d'origine (Commission des écoles catholiques de Montréal [CECM] 1998; McAndrew 1991). Initially, in 1979–80, PELO classes were only offered in Greek, Italian, and Portuguese to second- and third-generation children of European ancestry. Later, to meet increasing parental demand, the ministry introduced additional classes in Spanish, Algonquin, Vietnamese, Laotian, Hebrew, Arabic, Tagalog, Hindi, Urdu, Bengali, Sinhala, and Tamil (Commission scolaire de Montréal 2009; Ministère de l'Éducation, de Loisir et du Sport du Québec 2008). "Les enfants de la loi 101" refers to a distinct generation of multilingual residents under the age of 40 who have attended French-medium public schools and various heritage language schools, while also learning English through informal means, since 1977.

After endeavoring to secure the language loyalty of ethnic minorities through legislative means, the Parti Québécois hosted a series of public referendums to vote on the issue of Quebec's national sovereignty. The first referendum was held in 1980 and resulted in 40.44 percent of voters favoring Quebec's secession from Canada. The second referendum in 1995 resulted in an even closer margin of defeat, with 49.42 percent affirming votes. In a controversial statement that he later rescinded, then premier Jacques Parizeau blamed the loss of the second referendum on "ethnic minority" and "wealthy" voters. Although Parizeau's comment was ostensibly intended to highlight a disproportionate number of nay votes coming from Montreal's multiethnic and upper-class ridings,[9] it precipitated

**Table 1:** Sociolinguistic Diversity in Montreal, Quebec

| Ethnic Group | Heritage Language | Civic Language | Vernacular Language |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Québécois de souche | French | Québécois French | French |
| Indian Tamil | Spoken/Colloquial Tamil | Québécois French | English, Tamil |
| Sri Lankan Tamil | Written/Literary Tamil | Québécois French | French, English, Tamil |

a political backlash that led to the eventual replacement of the Parti Québécois by the Parti Libéral in 2003. This nonseparatist party, known for its neoliberal policies, favors limited constitutional sovereignty for Quebec within a system of Canadian federalism. Since its election, the Parti Libéral has promoted the interests of French Québécois nationalism by negotiating with the federal government to establish preferential criteria for admitting francophone and francophile immigrants to Quebec. Currently, 40 percent of Quebec's immigrant visas are reserved for French-speaking applicants, who are mostly of Algerian, French, and Moroccan nationality. All other applicants are evaluated according to their "ability to integrate and adapt to Quebec culture," which is calculated as the sum of their demonstrated French proficiency, previous visits and ties to Quebec, and prior knowledge of Québécois culture (Singer 2009).

These immigration policies have noticeably increased the prevalence of French spoken throughout the province. According to the 2006 census, 80.1 percent of Québécois identify French as their first language and 95 percent as their first, second, or third language (Statistics/Statistique Canada 2006). Extrapolating from these data, one could argue that most residents of Quebec, regardless of ethnic, linguistic, and national background, endorse the use of French as their common "civic" language. In Montreal, where there is much greater ethnic, national, and linguistic diversity, only 66 percent of the population identifies as francophone, 12 percent as anglophone, and 22 percent as allophone (Statistics/Statistique Canada 2006, 2007). Furthermore, a significant percentage of the majority francophone population is composed of immigrants from French-speaking countries and minorities educated in French public schools. Given the low birth rate of the *Québécois de souche* (Québécois of ethnic stock) population since the Quiet Revolution (Bourhis 2001), the municipal government has had to increasingly depend on an average annual influx of 33,000 new immigrants to reproduce francophone institutions. Whether French-speaking immigrants continue to self-identify as francophones or invest in francophone institutions after settling in Montreal is still unclear from the existing census data. However, with 60 percent of census respondents claiming competence in multiple languages, it is likely that competing language loyalties would have influenced the identity claims of many immigrants and minorities over the past few decades.

Since enforcing Bill 101 in 1977 and establishing the PELO in 1978, the Quebec government has pursued a dual policy of cultivating immigrants' and minorities' emotive attachment to a heritage language while encouraging their integration into francophone society. Government funds are earmarked for public and private organizations that teach heritage languages to ethnolinguistic minorities. In addition, the Board of the French Language (Office québécois de la langue française) has endorsed purist conventions to differentiate between a standard, or "literary," style of Québécois French as the civic language of the province, and nonstandard, or "colloquial," styles of Québécois joual as the heritage languages of the Québécois de souche (Cox 1998; Papen 1998; Saletti 1998).[10] Together, these institutional practices entail a nested hierarchy of sociolinguistic distinctions that permit a person to claim both Québécois identity by virtue of speaking the civic language and a different ethnolinguistic identity by virtue of speaking a heritage language. Montreal is better described as an ethnically and racially diverse *francophonie* than as a majority francophone city, for these reasons (see Table 1).

## Differentiating Indian and Sri Lankan heritage languages

Tamils, who are among the fastest growing minority groups in Canada, arrived in the country in two distinct waves of migration. Currently, there are approximately 20 to 30 thousand Sri Lankan Tamils and two to three thousand Indian Tamils living in the greater metropolitan region of Montreal (Statistics/Statistique Canada 1991a, 1991b, 2006, 2007).[11] Most Sri Lankan Tamils are lower- to middle-caste refugees who emigrated from the northern province of Jaffna during Sri Lanka's recent civil war (1983–2009). Men primarily work as semiskilled wage laborers or own small businesses catering to other Tamil clients, and women supplement their husbands' incomes by working in textile and jewelry factories or assisting in family-owned businesses. Sri Lankan Tamil families rent multigenerational apartment units in inner-city neighborhoods or purchase semidetached houses in lower-middle-class suburbs. In comparison, most Indian Tamils are Brahmin or higher-caste professionals and graduate students who emigrated from various Indian cities starting in the mid- to late 1960s. Both men and women primarily work in lucrative fields such as engineering, business, biochemistry, and information technology and own homes in relatively affluent suburbs or rent apartments in downtown neighborhoods. Because of their clear-cut differences in social status and political ideology, Sri Lankan Tamils and Indian Tamils have maintained a high degree of ethnonational segregation in establishing

residential neighborhoods, social networks, and community organizations.

Practices of self-segregation are common among purity-conscious Brahmin Tamils living in the diaspora (Fuller and Narasimhan 2008), but it is only in Montreal that communal politics are locally expressed in terms of linguistic politics. Here, Sri Lankan and Indian Tamils can display preferential loyalty to pronationalist or profederalist regimes through their choice of public or private, and French- or English-medium schools. To opt out of the French public school system, immigrant parents must enroll at least one of their children in an English-medium private school for a short time before they can enroll their remaining children in English-medium public schools. In general, Indian Tamil parents are better positioned financially to pursue this option, whereas Sri Lankan parents closely involved in the Tamil Eelam separatist movement are more sympathetic to linguistic nationalist policies requiring children to attend French-medium schools. These parental preferences have greatly contributed to the divergent linguistic repertoires of English-dominant Indian Tamil youth and their French-dominant Sri Lankan Tamil peers (Das 2008a).

By drawing attention to maximally contrastive sets of linguistic repertoires, diaspora leaders fashion alternative ways of talking about subtle distinctions in socioeconomic and caste status and political ideology. Because the Quebec government preferentially recognizes and funds ethnolinguistic rather than ethnonational organizations, it is common practice to refer to most ethnic and racial minorities by their heritage language. Thus, French speakers refer to both Indian and Sri Lankan Tamils as "tamouls." This label carries tremendous racial stigma, as Canadian media often depict Sri Lankan Tamils as "terrorists" for supporting the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) or as "thugs" for joining urban street gangs and criminal drug networks (Côte 2004; *Première Chaîne* 2006; *Presse* 2004).[12] Some Indians choose to publicly distance themselves from this stereotype by de-emphasizing their Tamil heritage and emphasizing their Indian nationality, and leaders of both ethnonational groups highlight certain grammatical and pragmatic contrasts in their use of literary and colloquial Tamil to emphasize ethnolinguistic differences. Over time, these strategies of ethnolinguistic differentiation have contributed to exaggerated claims of mutual unintelligibility between Tamil-speaking Indians and Sri Lankans living in Montreal (Das 2008a).

Especially pronounced are claims of mutual unintelligibility by second-generation Indian youth who have limited contact with Sri Lankan peers.[13] Take, for example, Hemanth's and Mohan's differing attitudes regarding the status of Indian Tamil and Sri Lankan Tamil as dialects or languages. Hemanth is a first-generation immigrant from Chennai, India, who studied engineering at Concordia University in downtown Montreal. He describes Sri Lankan Tamil as a grammatically purer dialect than most colloquial styles of Indian Tamil:

> Sri Lankan Tamil is very pure. It has not got polluted. I am coming from Chennai. It is the worst place to speak Tamil. Even people from South India, especially from Madurai, they will laugh at us. So I try to change myself when I speak to those people. Because it is very slang and colloquial language . . . so many dialects . . . When I first met Sri Lankans here, it's totally like I didn't even understand, they were laughing at me. So, it is very different.

Later in the conversation, Hemanth explains that this communication barrier dissolved soon after he joined a cricket team comprising mostly Sri Lankan players. Drawing on his academic background in classical Tamil literature, Hemanth was able to identify unfamiliar words spoken by Sri Lankan Tamil teammates as archaic literary words. In contrast, Mohan argues, "Sri Lankan Tamil . . . is a completely different language." This 30-year-old physician was born and raised in a middle-class suburb of Montreal, where he attended English-medium private schools and universities all his life. He compares Indians learning Sri Lankan Tamil to anglophones learning French: Both are learning foreign languages. Although he can converse well enough with his parents and in-laws in Tamil, Mohan requires the assistance of a translator in interacting with monolingual Sri Lankan Tamil patients at the community clinic where he works. Even though Mohan's father-in-law works as a Tamil–English translator at the nearby Jewish General Hospital, Mohan maintains that Sri Lankan Tamil is a language unintelligible to the average Indian speaker educated in Canada.

Contrasting attitudes exhibited by a French-speaking daughter-and-mother pair reveal how pragmatic and stylistic differences also play a role in characterizing Indian and Sri Lankan Tamil languages as mutually unintelligible. Marianne is a 30-year-old teacher who was born in Quebec and raised in France before permanently resettling in Montreal in her late twenties. She explicitly differentiates between Indian speakers of Spoken Tamil and Sri Lankan speakers of Written Tamil and attributes her personal inability to understand Sri Lankan Tamil speech to her illiteracy in reading and writing Tamil. Upon hearing her daughter's response, Madeleine clarifies that Sri Lankans actually speak a more classical and purist style of Tamil than Indians do. This 55-year-old woman, who was born in Pondicherry, raised in Saigon, and, after marriage, immigrated to France, where she often socialized with Sri Lankan Tamil women in her church, is more familiar with colloquial styles of Tamil spoken in Jaffna than her daughter. She claims that the relationship between Jaffna Tamil and Indian Tamil is analogous to the relationship between European French and Québécois

**Table 2:** Diglossic Model of Tamil Linguistic Variation

|  | Oral Language | Written Language |
|---|---|---|
| Function | "Spoken" Tamil (pēccu tamil̲) | "Written" Tamil (elut tutamil̲) |
| Style | "Colloquial" Tamil (kotuntamil̲) | "Literary" Tamil (ilakkiyattamil̲) |
| Age | "Modern" Tamil (1600 C.E.–present) | "Classical" Tamil (300 B.C.E.–700 C.E.) |
| Form | "Vulgar" Tamil (koccaittamil̲) | "Pure" Tamil (centamil̲) |

French: The first language in each pair is older, purer, and more literary-like than the second.

Hemanth and Madeleine, as first-generation immigrants, express similar folk theories of linguistic variation that are rooted in the concept of Tamil "diglossia." This concept emphasizes functionalist distinctions between written and spoken, pure and impure, literary and colloquial, and classical and modern varieties of Tamil (see Table 2). In common parlance, people in Tamil Nadu and Jaffna may simplify these categories by referring to both colloquial and modern styles as "Spoken Tamil" and both classical and literary styles as "Written Tamil." Furthermore, through recursive logic, modernist qualities are iconically attributed to speakers of Spoken Tamil and primordialist qualities to speakers of Written Tamil (Irvine and Gal 2000). These essentialist beliefs have been reinforced through a long and varied history of ethnolinguistic nationalist sentiment in the Tamil-speaking region of South Asia. From the late 19th century, Tamil nationalists in Sri Lanka have lauded Jaffna elites for maintaining a pure, almost classical style of speaking Tamil (Kalainathan 2000; Kandiah 1978; Rajan 1995), and, since the early 20th century, Dravidian nationalists in Tamil Nadu have criticized Brahmin Tamils for corrupting the phonology of literary Tamil by introducing foreign or "Sanskritized" words (Ramaswamy 1997). Together, both nationalist narratives feed into the globally pervasive stereotype of Jaffna Tamils as custodians of an ancient language, whereas Brahmin Tamils are viewed as harbingers of cultural and linguistic change.

Brahmin Tamils and Jaffna Tamils, as the caste and class elites of their respective Indian and Sri Lankan societies, rarely come into contact except in the diaspora. Historically, few Brahmins have resided in Jaffna, where Vellālar Tamils are the dominant caste. During Sri Lanka's recent civil war, middle-class Vellālar Tamils preferred to relocate to wealthier countries in North America and Europe rather than seek refuge in India. In Montreal, Vellālar Tamils from Jaffna have found themselves in the unfamiliar position of being unable to assert their class and caste dominance over more affluent and higher-caste Brahmin Tamils. For their part, Brahmin Tamils migrating from India have found themselves in the position of being unable to defend their cultural and linguistic authenticity compared to Sri Lankan Tamils migrating from Jaffna. Typical

of caste relations in South Asia, Sri Lankans and Indians in Montreal have, instead, forged distinct yet complementary pathways for achieving upward social mobility. Specifically, by claiming that Sri Lankans speak and write a classical style of Written Tamil and Indians speak and write a modern style of Spoken Tamil as their heritage languages, both groups justify their elite status on the basis of differentiated values of authenticity and modernity. These ethnonational subgroups are thus able to inhabit distinct ethnolinguistic identities by emphasizing historicized contrasts in their habitual use of colloquial and literary styles of Tamil.

## Diversifying the heritage language curriculum

Creating a diversified curriculum for teaching colloquial and literary Tamil to second-generation Indian and Sri Lankan children further institutionalizes ethnolinguistic distinctions between ethnonational groups. Since 1998, five French-medium and three English-medium public schools in Montreal have offered instruction in literary Tamil to Sri Lankan children through the state-funded PELO initiative. School board officials usually hire PELO teachers who are first-generation immigrants with valid teaching credentials or prior teaching experience in Sri Lanka. Nilima, who previously taught science at an elementary school in Jaffna, now teaches Tamil at an English-medium public school in Montreal. Although she was given the option to enroll her two sons at this school, Nilima, instead, elected to send them to a nearby French-medium public school, where they could better learn the "civic" language. She could not anticipate the irony that her sons would be unable to study Tamil through their own school's PELO initiative because, despite repeated petitions from Sri Lankan Tamil parents, the school's principal had allocated all funds for heritage language instruction to the teaching of Arabic (the majority heritage language at this school). Nilima's children, along with other children residing outside of the select school districts offering Tamil instruction, may, instead, attend classes offered weekly at Hindu temples, Catholic and Protestant churches, and other community organizations. With only 10 percent of their total funding provided by the Ministry of Cultural Communities, however, these community-based schools must rely heavily on donations from diaspora leaders and volunteer services from organization members for their successful operation (Canadian Education Association 1991).[14]

Because of different administrative structures and sources of funding, PELO and community-based schools have adopted slightly different curricula for teaching literary Tamil to Sri Lankan children. Originally, officials at the Catholic School Board of Montreal (CECM; now the Commission scolaire de Montréal) collaborated with the most senior Tamil PELO teacher to draft a curriculum guide for teaching Tamil at both the elementary and intermediate

level (CECM 1998). The following benchmarks are the result of this collaboration:

> Global Objectives (ORAL and WRITTEN)
> The main objectives of this program are: to preserve the heritage language and culture, to enable students to communicate in a standard language in situations related to their environment, and to learn the written language.

> Aims (ORAL and WRITTEN)
> The role of this program is to: maintain and improve the student's basic knowledge of the language and his or her specific language abilities, and to help the student develop the attitudes required to cultivate an interest in the heritage language and to appreciate and identify with the culture. [CECM 1998:12]

By stating in the same sentence that students should learn to "communicate in the standard language" and "learn the written language," the Global Objectives suggest a close relationship, even resemblance, between colloquial Sri Lankan Tamil and the written standard. Also, by stating that the "role of the program" is to "help the student develop the attitudes required to cultivate an interest in the heritage language and to appreciate and identify with the culture," the Aims explicitly conflate students' ethnic identities with their heritage languages. Together, these subtexts convey the message that students must be taught to speak, write, and identify with a standardized style of literary Tamil to "preserve the heritage language and culture" of Sri Lankans in Montreal.

Community-based schools, taught by former Jaffna schoolteachers and parental volunteers, endorse similar aims and objectives that more explicitly conflate Sri Lankan heritage with literary Tamil. The World Tamil Movement (WTM) is a transnational organization that provides social services and relief funds to Sri Lankan Tamil refugees and finances most community-based schools in the global diaspora. In 2003, WTM leaders convened to write a standardized curriculum for teaching literary Tamil to Sri Lankan children growing up in Western countries. Closely affiliated with the WTM headquarters in Toronto are the Academy of Tamil Arts and Technology and the Ontario Academy of Fine Arts in Mississauga, which manufacture and distribute most teaching manuals, CD-ROMs, and pedagogical materials required to teach in WTM schools. The largest WTM school in Montreal is the School of Heritage Studies at the Thiru Murugan temple, with approximately one hundred twenty-five students (Saiva Mission of Quebec, Canada 2008). During my classroom observations there from March to June 2005, I noticed how each grade level was designed to incrementally increase children's knowledge and skill of literary Tamil. Whereas teachers generally permitted kindergarten and first-grade students to speak in a colloquial style of Jaffna Tamil for conversational practice, they gradually obligated older students to speak, read, and write only in the literary standard. By the fourth grade, children were reading short stories and responding to oral comprehension questions in literary Tamil; by the ninth grade, children were composing and reciting original essays in this written standard. That June, only two students passed the rigorous tenth-grade exam required to receive an official certificate of matriculation signed by global WTM leaders and recognizing their mastery of literary Tamil.

A parliamentary decision taken in April 2006 to add the WTM to Canada's list of banned terrorist groups formalized an existing local discourse that WTM leaders extort money from Tamil Canadian citizens to fund the LTTE. Indian Tamil diaspora leaders have long since kept their distance from the WTM for this reason and instead established the Quebec Tamil Association to promote "awareness of the culture of Tamil Nadu (India) in [the] Montreal area" (Tamilagam 2007). One of the organization's missions is to advise parents how to teach Tamil to their children at home, even offering tips on "making children speak Tamil" and including links to Internet resources such as "Ram S. Ravindran's Web Based Spoken Tamil," which promises that one can "sound like a native with these simple rules" (Tamilagam 2007). Also advertised on the website are private tutoring classes offered by R. A. Krishnan, one of the founding members of the Quebec Tamil Association. In 2004, Krishnan wrote and published the first volume of his textbook series, *Spoken Tamil Grammar Book,* to teach second-generation children "the spoken language used by street shopkeepers in Chennai" (2004:5). Even though "shopkeeper Chennai Tamil" is widely regarded in Tamil Nadu as an impure, low-prestige linguistic variety, Krishnan depicts this colloquial style as uniquely suitable for cosmopolitan elites living in and traveling from the diaspora. He even adopts a romanized script to phonetically represent its sounds without having to teach students how to read and write in the literary standard. According to Krishnan, this textbook series is especially popular in large Indian and North American cities where multilingual expertise in "colloquial languages" is highly valued among urban elites who attend English-medium schools.

Comparisons of the different curricular styles of Indian and Sri Lankan Tamil heritage language classes reveal how first-generation diaspora leaders are invested in promoting divergent pathways of ethnolinguistic identification and heritage language learning among second-generation children. Whereas the Quebec Tamil Association emphasizes home instruction and private tutoring to facilitate children's acquisition of spoken competence in colloquial Tamil, the PELO and WTM both emphasize school instruction to facilitate children's acquisition of written and spoken competence in literary Tamil. These diverse curricula fortify diasporic claims of ethnonational and ethnolinguistic distinction by projecting a complementary division of

**Table 3:** Division of Language Labor in Tamil Heritage Language Schools in Montreal

|  | Indian Curriculum | Sri Lankan Curriculum |
|---|---|---|
| Oral skills | Converse in colloquial or Spoken Tamil | Converse in literary or Written Tamil |
| Literacy skills | Write in colloquial or Spoken Tamil | Write in literary or Written Tamil |
|  | Read modern Tamil literature | Read classical Tamil literature |

language labor in which Indians work to revitalize the prestige of Spoken Tamil and Sri Lankans work to preserve the purity of Written Tamil (see Table 3). Because most Sri Lankan children grow up already speaking Tamil at home, their participation in heritage language classes is intended to complement existing oral competence and preserve the timeless use of the written language in the diaspora. For Indian Tamil children, who are mostly English dominant at home, participation in these classes is intended to revitalize and modernize the spoken language for use in new globalizing contexts. Curricular discourses, by naturalizing indexical associations between Sri Lankan Tamils and past literary traditions as well as between Indian Tamils and modernizing colloquial repertoires, succeed in rendering ethnolinguistic distinctions between ethnonational groups of *tamouls* more apparent to the public eye.

## Teaching literary Tamil to Sri Lankan children

Sri Lankan teachers carry a disproportionate burden of this language labor because of their ideological emphasis on preserving literary Tamil, a language not commonly spoken in Montreal. Even though curricular discourses imply that Sri Lankans speak classical, or literary, Tamil as their heritage language, their vernacular is better described as a Jaffna style of colloquial Tamil that has retained a significant amount of classical lexicon and a large number of literary syntactic features. It is thus grammatically distinct from all written forms and genres of Tamil. To facilitate students' comprehension of this unfamiliar language, teachers must first draw on their prior knowledge of colloquial Jaffna Tamil and then demonstrate how to convert that into literary Tamil. At the same time, teachers must promote students' ethnolinguistic identification with literary Tamil by highlighting certain grammatical similarities with colloquial Jaffna Tamil. These conflicting goals result in teachers mixing colloquial and literary forms of Tamil in distinctly ordered ways.

In the following analysis, I avoid labeling this multilingual practice "code-mixing" or "code-switching" because students do not always perceive colloquial and literary forms as belonging to different linguistic systems. At the same time, I avoid labeling all mixed utterances "bivalent" (Woolard 1998) because teachers may seek to emphasize hierarchical distinctions in their formal composition. Rather,

I highlight how specifically ordered sequences of colloquial and literary forms convey different messages about developmental trajectories of language acquisition and historical trajectories of linguistic degeneration. The most common order is for students to first volunteer their answers in colloquial Jaffna Tamil and for teachers to then transliterate or translate them into literary Tamil. This sequence diagrams a developmental narrative naturalizing the step-by-step acquisition of, first, colloquial and, then, literary Tamil expertise. This sequence also challenges the assumption that literary Tamil is older than and primordial with respect to colloquial Jaffna Tamil. A less common order is for teachers to first introduce a word in literary Tamil and then translate it into colloquial Tamil. This sequence, by naturalizing the word-by-word decomposition from literary Tamil into colloquial Tamil, instead reinforces narratives of linguistic degeneration implicit in Sri Lankan curricular discourses.

From January to May 2006, I observed and recorded lessons at two Tamil PELO classes at Parker Elementary, an English-medium public school that also offers instruction in Greek, Hindi–Urdu, and Bengali every Tuesday and Thursday afternoon from 3:00 to 4:30.[15] Vasanthi teaches the first- through third-grade beginner class, and Nilima teaches the fourth- through sixth-grade intermediate class. Although I found that both teachers regularly alternate literary and colloquial forms within and across utterances, Nilima most consistently adheres to the above-mentioned co-occurrence patterns. In the lesson transcribed below, Nilima (N) begins class by writing the date "24 தை 2006 செவ்வாய்" on the board and stating:

> N:  okay n̲ān ḍēṭɨ el̲utukir̲atɨ
> okay I am writing the date

She utters this phrase in a style of colloquial Jaffna Tamil that is nominally interspersed with English words such as *ḍēṭɨ* (date) and *okay*. Naveen, one of the more vocal students (S) in the class, calls out:

> S:  t̄icher iruvatināl̲ɨ tai sappay kilamɛ
> teacher Tuesday the 24th of Tai month

Naveen also speaks in colloquial Jaffna Tamil. This is evident in his use of the phonological variants [p] (rather than [v]), [ɛ] (rather than [ai]), and [l] (rather than [γ]) and in his epenthesis of [ɨ] after *naḷ* (Schiffman 1999). Nilima promptly repeats Naveen's response, translating select words into literary Tamil (highlighted in bold):

> N:  iruvatināl̲ɨ tai **sevvay kilamai**
> Tuesday the 24th of Tai month

Here, *iruvatināl̲ɨ* retains its colloquial form, *sevvay* assumes a new literary form, and *tai* functions as a bivalent form bridging the words on either side. This sequence func-

tionally diagrams to students how to convert from colloquial Jaffna Tamil words into literary Tamil. Positioned at the end of sentence is *kilamai,* a word composed of a distinctly colloquial Jaffna Tamil sound ([l] rather than literary [γ]) and a literary Tamil sound ([ai] rather than colloquial [ɛ]). Both Nilima and her students would perceive this as a literary Tamil, and not a bivalent, word because most Sri Lankan Tamils cannot easily distinguish between [l] and [γ] sounds.[16] By conflating sounds of colloquial Jaffna Tamil with literary Tamil, *kilamai* has the effect of rendering prior phonological variations even less perceptible.

Later in the lesson, Nilima teaches students how to compose compound words. She begins by writing "கத்திரிக்காய் = கத்திரி + காய்" on the board and stating to the class in literary Tamil:

N: **kattirikkāy enṟāl** eggplant
    kattirikkay means eggplant

Sonali (S), another vocal student in the class, calls out a second example, using the colloquial Jaffna Tamil for *banana.* Nilima transliterates and translates Sonali's suggestion by writing "வாழைப்பழம் = வாழை + பழம்" and responding to her in literary Tamil:

S: vālēppalam
   banana
N: **vāḻaippaḻam vāḻai paḻam**
   banana

This didactic exchange, characterized by a student volunteering a word in colloquial Jaffna Tamil and a teacher then translating it into literary Tamil, reinforces an intergenerational gap in linguistic competence. Without Nilima's assistance, students appear unable to convert their elementary knowledge of colloquial Jaffna Tamil into more specialized knowledge of literary Tamil.

Only after writing an unfamiliar example on the board, "பணியோசை = பணி + ஒசை," does Nilima first introduce a compound word in colloquial Jaffna Tamil:

(1) S: appaṭiṇṇɨ enna ṭīcher
       what is the meaning teacher
(2) N: maṇiyōsɛ ḍiṅg ḍing
       bell sound ding ding
(3) S: bell bell sound
       bell bell sound
(4) N: ippo nān solradɛ ellām sollɨ
       now all of you say it like I say it
(5) N: **maṇiyōsai** maṇi ōsɛ
       bell sound bell sound
(6) N: **n̄āṅgaḷ** appaṭiṇṇu **solluvōm**
       we will say it in this manner
(7) N: **maṇiyōsai**

Although Nilima utters *maṇiyōsɛ* in line 2 in colloquial Jaffna Tamil, she does so simply to establish a familiar footing for students who cannot recall this word from their everyday vocabulary. After students correctly guess the meaning in line 3, Nilima first repeats the entire word in literary Tamil in line 5 (*maṇiyōsai)* before breaking it down into its lexical components in colloquial Jaffna Tamil *(maṇi ōsɛ).* This sequence conveys a subtle message. First, the pairing of *maṇiyōsai* and *maṇi ōsɛ* suggests a grammatical simplification in the evolution from literary Tamil to colloquial Tamil. Second, because students already think that colloquial Jaffna Tamil is phonologically similar to literary Tamil, this temporal narrative maps onto existing curricular discourses of intergenerational language loss. Through this pairing, therefore, Nilima is able to affirm that her expert knowledge and skill of literary Tamil are essential to protect Jaffna language and culture from degeneration and decay among youthful speakers in the diaspora.

Overall, Nilima's use of literary and colloquial forms reinforces her students' identification with literary Tamil as their heritage language. Nilima also implies that their heritage language is purer and older than the heritage language spoken by Indian children. Sometimes she conveys this message explicitly, as when she instructs her students to use Tamil words for "stamp," "letter," "post office," and "bank," even though Indians (portrayed in films) use the English words for these things. At other times, when a teacher enforces purist standards for grammatical but not pragmatic norms, this message is self-contradictory. During a lesson in Vasanthi's beginner class about constructing simple sentences in subject-object-verb order, a student reads his written sentence aloud in Tamil and finishes by uttering "period" in English. Vasanthi insists that he say "muṭṭu pulli" instead of "period," even though European missionaries introduced this punctuation convention to modern Tamil literature only in the 19th century (Kandiah 1978). Because Nilima and Vasanthi learned to speak in colloquial and literary Tamil while living in the Jaffna homeland, children generally accept their idiosyncratic practices of mixing grammatical forms and adhering to different pragmatic conventions as having an important social function. Later, former students will similarly draw on their own knowledge and skill of different colloquial and literary languages to reconstruct their personal experiences as heritage language speakers in more empowering ways.

## Ethnolinguistic identities of Indian and Sri Lankan Tamil youth

Although it may seem that placement in heritage language classes determines ethnolinguistic identification, this is not always the case in Montreal. Instead, Tamil youth may exploit their diverse linguistic repertoires in standard and

nonstandard, as well as colloquial and literary, varieties of Tamil, French, and English to construct social identities or enact personae that contest their negative depiction as "semi-speakers" (Zentella 1997). Common to English-speaking North America, this stereotype subjects minority youth to a double standard of cultural authenticity imposed on them by language elites in both majority and minority linguistic communities. In Montreal, where minority youth sometimes acquire greater expertise in written Québécois French than do their Québécois de souche peers (whose colloquial use of nonstandard French joual may interfere with their acquisition of standard Québécois French), accusations of political disloyalty are specifically targeted at those who choose to speak a language other than French in public. Accusations of cultural inauthenticity instead arise from conflicting attitudes between first-generation immigrants and second-generation minorities regarding the future value of Tamil in the diaspora. The following vignettes demonstrate how a young Sri Lankan Tamil woman and an Indian Tamil teenage boy negotiate these interethnic and intergenerational conflicts by narrating or enacting alternative tales of personal empowerment.

Selvamani was born in Jaffna, Sri Lanka, in 1980, three years before the onset of civil war. She and her family first relocated to an Indian refugee camp in 1983 before permanently seeking asylum in Canada in 1986. Now, Selvamani resides with her grandparents, parents, and four siblings in a three-bedroom apartment in a predominantly Sri Lankan Tamil neighborhood of Montreal. She attended French-language primary and secondary schools and then later an English-language college and university. She also attended a heritage language class in literary Tamil at the Sri Durgai Amman temple for three years. From this experience, Selvamani has retained only basic knowledge of the Tamil alphabet and little comprehension of religious and political oratory in literary Tamil. At home, she converses with her parents and grandparents mostly in colloquial Jaffna Tamil and with her siblings in a mixture of Tamil, French, and English. I first met Selvamani (S) and her sister Mala (M) at the Durgai temple, where their family worships at least once a week. We arranged to meet several weeks later at the temple steps to swap stories of our mutual childhood experiences in Montreal. During this conversation, Selvamani explained to me that she prefers to self-identify as Québécois because of her habitual use of French and as Indian because she spent her early childhood years living in Tamil Nadu. When asked by strangers if she is Sri Lankan, she denies it to avoid being reminded of painful experiences of war and racism. In the following excerpt, Selvamani describes interactions with Sri Lankan and Filipino neighbors that led her to take this stance.

(1)  S:  Parce que n'importe quand quand
          Because whenever

(2)  j'enregistre ma voix ça l'aire d'un garçon.
     I record my voice I sound like a guy.

(3)  Alors, TSÉ, je me ferrai pas poigné
     So, you know, I'm not going to be had.

(4)  **ennatā, ennatā, enna romba ciritā?** [laughter]
     What, what, what's so funny?

(5)  Alors, qu'est-ce que je disais? Bon lorsque
     So, what was I saying? Okay, when

(6)  j'étais adolescente, comme depuis secondaire
     I was a teenager, like since the 9th

(7)  trois, j'avais pas de contact avec des gens de
     grade, I didn't interact with the people of

(8)  mon pays mais, disons que j'en avais mais
     my country, let's say I did but

(9)  c'était pas des meilleurs, alors, qu'est-ce qu'on
     it wasn't the best, so, what we

(10) faisait', comme, je trouvais ça honteux de mettre
     would do, like, I thought it was embarrassing to wear

(11) le bindi ou bien de parler dans ma la langue ou
     a bindi or to speak in my language or

(12) quoi que ce soit, je trouvais ça comme insultant
     whatever, I found it like insulting

(13) pour moi, okay, parce que, TSÉ, ils nous traitaient
     personally, okay, because, you know, they would call us

(14) comme paki, en gé'néral dès que t'était brun
     pakis, normally, as long as you were brown

(15) avant c'etait le terme paki qui était connu.
     before paki was the term that was known.

(16) M: Ç'a diminué maintenant.
     It's not as bad now.

(17) S: Oui, ç'a diminué maintenant
     Yes, it's not as bad now

(18) oui, comparé avant oui.
     yes, compared to before, yes.

(19) TSÉ, ils nous traitaient, ils disaient des mauvais
     You know, they would call us, they would say really bad

(20) mots, carrément, mais des mauvais mots,
     words, I mean really, bad words.

(21) Je m'excuse' mais là', ils sont des retardés.
     I beg your pardon but, you know, they are retarded.

For the most part, Selvamani speaks to me in standard Québécois French, our customary language of communication. Only after making a droll observation about the pitch of her voice does she switch to colloquial Tamil (bold) to pointedly ask Mala why she is laughing. This aside, the most notable linguistic feature of Selvamani's narrative is her use of joual, both through the inclusion of nonstandard lexicon (capitalized) and overlaying stress patterns (indicated with accent marks). For example, in lines 10, 14, and 21, she says "faisaí;," "en gé'néral," "je m'excusé," and "là" with the prosodic accuracy of a native joual speaker, even though

these words are not strictly used in joual. She also inserts idiomatic expressions in joual (underlined), such as *tsé, je m'excuse là,* and *je me ferrai pas poigné,* at the beginnings or ends of clauses in lines 3, 19, and 21 before delivering a particular subversive comment, such as "ils sont des retardés" (they are retarded). This use of nonstandard French commonly associated with working-class Québécois de souche speech is even more striking in juxtaposition with Mala's use of European French phonology in line 16 (italicized).[17] Given their combined range of stylistic variation, there is no doubt that Selvamani and her sister are quite competent speakers of French. In fact, Selvamani displays exceptional skill in incorporating just enough joual forms to authenticate her mockery of those less capable of integrating into majority francophone culture, namely, people she refers to as "Sri Lankan terrorists" and "Filipino racists."

A year later, when we were talking on the phone, Selvamani informed me of her upcoming marriage to a Tamil man living in Tiruchy, India. I realized then that she was finally achieving her lifelong dream of becoming Indian, albeit through affinal relation. Despite attending heritage language classes in literary Tamil for three years and worshipping at a Hindu temple intended exclusively for Sri Lankan patrons, Selvamani has chosen to self-identify with the heritage languages and cultures of Indian Tamils and Québécois de souche in her adulthood. She further explained that she proudly publicizes this choice to disapproving elders at the Sri Durgai temple by showing them she can mix colloquial forms of Tamil with standard and nonstandard forms of French (Das 2008a). By performing this linguistic impurity with relative impunity, Selvamani undermines the moral message of Tamil nationalist discourses that warn against the dangers of speaking grammatically degenerate colloquial languages in the diaspora.

Similar themes of intergenerational strife were humorously raised at a cultural show sponsored by the Quebec Tamil Association in celebration of the Hindu holiday of Deepavali in October 2005. Both first-generation elders and second-generation youth coauthored this show and a female college student originally from India and male teenager born in Montreal served as its masters of ceremony (Das 2008b). During a brief segment of the show, the MCs assume the roles of immigrant mother *(ammā)* and Canadian-born son *(makan)* to poke fun at the cultural and linguistic ignorance of second-generation Tamil youth. In this humorous exchange, ammā speaks to makan in Tamil, and makan responds in a Tamil–English drawl. At one point, makan "fails" to recognize a telling phonemic distinction between long and short vowels by mistaking the word for "debate" *(paṭṭi manṟam)* with the one for "grandmother" *(pāṭṭi).* Parents know that children who are English or French dominant cannot easily distinguish between vowel lengths in Tamil. Thus, even after ammā corrects his mistake, makan continues to "incorrectly" superimpose

English stress patterns and intonation contours onto Tamil words and phrases, as well as Tamil stress patterns and intonation contours onto English words and phrases. What is so striking about the teenager's performance is his ability to seamlessly alternate prosodic laminations while simultaneously switching between codes. In the following excerpt from this skit, I underscore the use of English intonation contours (rise–fall–rise) when Tamil is spoken and highlight in bold the use of Tamil intonation contours (fall–rise–fall) when English is spoken (Keane 2007). I also indicate cases of English stress patterns overlaying Tamil stress patterns with italics and further specify English lexical stress with accent marks and Tamil lexical stress with superscript.

(1)  *āʹmā* you said something about paṭṭi manṟam
(2)  **what is that**
(3)  **is pāṭṭi coming over, I don't know**
(4)  **oh it's a debate is it**
(5)  **oh actually speaking**
(6)  *nāʹ kūʹṭa rōmʹba* school debate *paʹṇṇi tērʹpen*
(7)  ya ya, our favorite, all the time, debate *paʹṇṇi tērʹpen*
(8)  so what's the topic

Skillfully alternating between Tamil-accented English and English-accented Tamil in lines 1–2 and 5–6, the teenager playing makan briefly steps outside of his caricatured role to expose his true mastery of both languages. Audience members laughingly realize that the teenager is challenging a popular stereotype of second-generation boys as being too lazy to speak Tamil properly. Rather, his effortless prosodic alternations imply that a youthful, laid-back style is necessary for mastering multiple languages, a feat less easily accomplished by more serious-minded elders. The performative iconicity of makan's lazy drawl and the teenager's effortless alternations thus evokes a cosmopolitan voice that celebrates pragmatic accomplishments of multilingualism above monolingualism. At the same time, the lack of alignment between makan's carefree tone and the teenager's subversive undertone creates a double-voicing effect that celebrates an ironic rather than authentic stance. This ironic subtone conveys the teen's ability and his intent to counter stereotypical notions about the presumed moral and cultural deficiencies of second-generation youth. In fact, so swiftly executed is this performance that audience members are left wondering whether elders, who are less skillful in mastering the multiple languages spoken in Montreal, are more or less disadvantaged than youth, who are only less competent in Tamil.

No doubt leaders of the Quebec Tamil Association chose this teenage boy to serve as master of ceremonies because of his acquired skill in and knowledge of colloquial Tamil and English. Also, through the boy's pretense of linguistic ineptitude, they are able to issue a gentle reminder to parents about the unpleasant consequences awaiting them if they choose not to speak to their children

in Tamil at home or not to send them to private heritage language classes. Because Indian diaspora leaders ultimately want second-generation children to adapt or modernize Tamil to new globalizing contexts such as in Montreal, the teenager's creative display of language play is appreciated as funny rather than as threatening to elders, such as Krishnan, who helped write the script. In comparison, leaders of the WTM are much less tolerant of any disrespectful usage of literary Tamil. For example, after showing videos of freshly dug graves at the Martyr's Day memorial in November 2005, WTM leaders exhorted parents in the audience to speak in "pure Tamil" *(centamil)* to their children in anticipation of the day when everyone will return to the Eelam homeland following a victorious end to the war. During such events, WTM leaders never discuss the possibility that youth may choose to self-identify as Indian rather than Sri Lankan, or as Québécois rather than Tamil, after attending heritage language classes. Neither do leaders of the Quebec Tamil Association consider that multilingual youth may profess greater metapragmatic savvy than the monolingual elders hired to teach them. Nonetheless, these alternative trajectories of heritage language learning and ethnolinguistic identification are common among second-generation youth who, for different reasons, implicitly or explicitly challenge nationalist narratives of linguistic degeneration and curricular discourses of intergenerational language loss. Whether these performances will eventually decouple the material and ideological processes involved in objectifying heritage languages and essentializing minority speakers — thereby putting Montreal's Tamil heritage language industry out of business — still remains to be seen.

## Conclusion: Beyond heritage languages

When I first began researching the Tamil PELO in 2002, I asked a high-ranking official at the Commission scolaire Marguerite Bourgeoys to comment on the future role of heritage languages in contemporary Québécois society. She responded that the concept of "heritage language" was already a relic of the past. Rather, new ways of thinking about minority language education have led school board officials to adopt new programs openly favoring neoliberal agendas. The next big thing is to educate children in one of several "living language[s] with an international character" [une langue vivante qui a un caractère international] (Belzil 2006:69) that will better equip them to compete in a global market: "Dans le contexte actuel de mondialisation des échanges et des communications, la connaissance de plusieurs langues représente un atout de taille puisqu'elle permet de s'exprimer avec des locuteurs de diverses communautés culturelles et de développer envers celles-ci une attitude d'ouverture, de respect et de tolérance" [In the present context of globalized trade and communication, knowledge of many languages represents a major asset

since it allows a person to communicate with interlocutors of various cultural communities and develop an attitude of openness, respect and tolerance toward these communities] (Belzil 2006:69). This idea that all Québécois children, and not just ethnic minorities, could benefit from learning a third language other than French or English was first endorsed by urban elites who petitioned the government in 1998 to open PELO classes to children of all ethnic backgrounds (Lamarre and Dagenais 2004; Lightbown and Spada 1994).[18] Most recently in 2007, the Ministry of Education, Leisure, and Sports implemented a new state-funded educational initiative, "Spanish as a Third Language Program" (Programme d'espagnol, langue tierce), to teach Spanish to public school children of non-Hispanic descent:

> Destinés à des élèves qui ne connaissent pas ou qui connaissent peu la langue enseignée, les cours de langue tierce initient les élèves à une nouvelle langue et à la culture qu'elle véhicule. Le programme d'espagnol vise donc à amener l'élève québécois non hispanophone à communiquer dans cette langue, à se familiariser avec les cultures qui s'y rattachent et à développer pour elle un intérêt qui ira bien au delà de ses études secondaires [Intended for students with minimal to no competence in the assigned language, courses that teach a third language introduce students to a new language and associated culture. The Spanish program therefore seeks to help non-Hispanic Québécois students to communicate in this language, familiarize themselves with its related cultures, and develop an interest in the language that will endure beyond high school]. [Belvil 2006:69]

According to the ministry, teaching Spanish to Québécois children would significantly improve trade relations in the Americas: "Elle peut aussi s'avérer fort utile au moment de se trouver un emploi, au Québec ou ailleurs, en raison notamment de l'accroissement des échanges commerciaux avec les pays hispanophones" [It also can be very useful when looking for a job, in Quebec or elsewhere, especially considering the increase in trade with Spanish-speaking countries] (Ministère de l'Éducation, de Loisir et du Sport du Québec n.d.:1). Ironically, these trade relations hinge on the reproduction of an unequal division of language labor that unfairly segregates Hispanic children, who can only study Spanish as their heritage language, from non-Hispanic children, who can also study Spanish as an international language. The steady attrition of government funds for heritage language education programs since 1994 further indicates that non-Hispanics may have exclusive access to Spanish language instruction in Quebec's public school system one day soon.

Ranked as the fifth most popular heritage language in Montreal, with 221 total students enrolled in classes and the largest incoming class of preschool students in

2007–08, Tamil has yet to be designated an international language by the Quebec government (Ministère de l'Éducation, de Loisir et du Sport du Québec 2008).[19] This, of course, makes sense given that the province is primarily seeking economic and political alliances among Western hemispheric interests. Moreover, because Tamil is not the majority language of any particular South Asian country, teaching this language to Québécois children would not dramatically improve trade relations with the subcontinent, especially in comparison with Hindi, the official language of India and a popular heritage language in Montreal as well. Tamil is better characterized as an iconically diasporic language, with 70 million speakers dispersed throughout the world, as well as a "classical" living language par excellence, with a literary history of more than 2,000 years and counting. Periodic shifts in its metalinguistic characterization as "heritage" or "classical" language have allowed for Tamil to traverse the world while remaining relevant in various sociohistorical contexts. Often, this shift in signification occurs in such places where multiple nationalist ideologies vie for political influence and public endorsement. The city of Montreal, with its commitment to neoliberal integration and accelerating rates of immigration, is presently caught up in the resignification of minority languages. With new generations of minority and majority residents renegotiating the future terms of ethnolinguistic belonging in an increasingly multilingual city, government initiatives to teach international languages are but the latest manifestation of ongoing attempts to reappropriate minority languages for nationalist projects.

As is well known, marked periods of interethnic and intergenerational struggle, especially in contexts of globalization, heighten awareness of linguistic contrast (Blommaert et al. 2005; Heller 2003). Whereas, prior to 1977, awareness of contrast in Montreal focused mostly on code choice between francophones, anglophones, and allophones, after "les enfants de la loi 101" irrevocably changed the city's linguistic landscape, this awareness has refocused on pragmatic distinctions between monolingual and multilingual speakers. In addition, multilingual speakers such as Indian and Sri Lankan immigrants, refugees, and their descendants demonstrate greater awareness of functionalist distinctions between written and spoken language by reframing discourses of intergenerational language loss and historical degeneration into diverse tales of Indians writing Spoken Tamil, Sri Lankans speaking Written Tamil, and Indian-identifying Sri Lankans speaking joual. What is to say the story ends here? As the struggle for minority language rights continues to play out in Montreal and other multilingual cities, it is possible that future generations will pay even greater attention to more minute grammatical and pragmatic contrasts in ways of speaking and writing. And, as competing and complementary discourses about heritage language continue to circulate globally, temporal narratives that threaten to flatten the social life of language will likely encounter novel forms of agency to resist its dichotomies.

## Notes

1. According to Barbara Kirschenblatt-Gimblett (2004, 2006), the UNESCO concept complicates assumptions about material and immaterial, living and nonliving, and permanent and impermanent aspects of human culture. UNESCO has most recently redefined "intangible heritage" as a type of embodied knowledge or skill:

> The "intangible cultural heritage" means the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills—as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith—that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage . . . The "intangible cultural heritage" . . . is manifested inter alia in the following domains: (a) oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of the intangible cultural heritage; (b) performing arts; (c) social practices, rituals and festive events; (d) knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe; (e) traditional craftsmanship. [UNESCO 2011c]

In the same document, UNESCO also refers to "intangible heritage" as a "fragile living treasure." I argue that this dual characterization underwrites a particular temporal vision of globalization in which "inherited traditions from the past" are imagined as coexisting with "contemporary rural and urban practices" only in a marginalized or endangered state (UNESCO 2011c).

2. This research is based on 19 months of fieldwork, from December 2004 to August 2006 (excluding May to June 2006), at four Indian and Sri Lankan Tamil heritage language schools in Montreal. I am a native speaker of joual and Québécois French and have studied Tamil with Dr. K. Karunakaran at the University of Michigan for two years, at the American Institute for Indian Studies in Madurai for three months, and with a Sri Lankan and an Indian tutor in Montreal for one year each.

3. A joint commission of scholars explained to UNESCO that existing storage facilities in Tamil Nadu were insufficient to preserve this "documentary heritage" for posterity.

4. Toronto has the largest Tamil-speaking population outside of any South Asian city, with approximately 300 thousand individuals. Because Indian and Sri Lankan Tamils are diverse in terms of their socioeconomic and caste status, there are no claims that differentiate all Sri Lankan Tamils from all Indian Tamils in terms of language.

5. I borrow here from Laura Ahearn's notion of agency as the "culturally constrained capacity to act" (2001:7).

6. *Francophone* refers to an individual whose first language is French, *anglophone* refers to an individual whose first language is English, and *allophone* refers to an individual whose first language is neither French nor English. In practice, however, the term *allophone* is often used to designate a "visible minority." Native people, who are referred to as "autochthones" or "Amerindiens," are often erased from multicultural discourses about ethnic diversity in Montreal.

7. Canada has two official languages, French and English. Some territories and provinces recognize three official languages, French, English, and Inuktitut. Quebec has only one official language, French. Bill 22, passed in 1974, declared French Quebec's sole official language. However, it was not until the passage of Bill 101 in 1977 that the government was granted punitive authority to enforce the official use of French throughout the province.

8. Bill 101 exempts children whose siblings or parents had previously attended English-medium elementary or secondary schools in Montreal or elsewhere in Canada.

9. Canadian ridings are roughly equivalent to U.S. electoral districts.

10. Standard Québécois French is modeled on the speech of Radio-Canada broadcasters who are born in Quebec and educated in France (Cox 1998). Most nonprestigious Québécois French vernaculars are referred to as "joual." Originally, the word *joual,* which is a variant pronunciation of *cheval* (horse), signified the "horse-like" speech of uneducated working-class and rural populations. Nowadays, the general consensus is that most Québécois speak some form of joual as their everyday language of communication: "Le Québec est encore une société joualisante, quoi que laissent croire l'Office de la langue française " [Quebec is still a joual-speaking society, regardless of what the Office of the French Language wants you to believe] (Saletti 1998: D6, my translation). For some, the mere use of liturgical profanity indexes joual-like speech, which is sometimes described as a socially or morally depraved slang or argot: "Le joual n'est au fond rien d'autre que la version argotique ou populaire de ce français d'ici. Tout comme l'argot ou le verlan vis-à-vis du français de France, tout comme le 'slang' vis-à-vis de l'anglais américain" [At its base joual is nothing other than slang or popular French spoken here. Much like the difference between slang or street talk and French of France or like the difference between American English and slang] (*Droit* 2008: 15, my translation). This notion of linguistic impurity is also implicit in the grammatical description of joual as a contact language. According to most linguists, joual historically evolved from prolonged linguistic and cultural contact between Québécois French settlers and descendants (who spoke a variety of 17th-century French from northwestern France) and North American English-speaking settlers and descendants.

11. According to the 2006 census, 13,895 Tamils reside in Montreal, among whom 11,530 speak Tamil as their "mother tongue" (Statistics/Statistique Canada 2006). These numbers include first-generation skilled, semiskilled, and unskilled immigrants and refugees from Sri Lanka, India, Malaysia, South Africa, and Europe (in order of decreasing population) as well as second-generation descendants. Because many Sri Lankan Tamils are undocumented residents in Montreal, these statistics are believed to underestimate the actual Tamil population size by at least half. Sri Lankan Tamils are among the fastest-growing immigrant groups in Canada: "Between 2001 and 2006, language groups from Asia and the Middle East recorded the largest gains. These language groups include the Chinese languages, Punjabi, Arabic, Urdu, Tagalog and Tamil" (Statistics/Statistique Canada 2007). Currently, Tamil is the second most commonly spoken South Asian language in Montreal after Punjabi.

12. The film *1999,* directed by Lenin M. Sivam (2009), deconstructs stereotypical notions of Tamil youth gangs in Toronto.

13. This is not the case among Sri Lankan Tamils, who are often more familiar with colloquial styles of Indian Tamil from watching Tamil films produced in Chennai.

14. Community-based schools are funded by Quebec's Heritage Language Program (Programme des langues ethniques, or PLE).

15. Children who attend English-medium public schools must have a parent or older sibling who previously attended an English-medium public or private school in Canada. Because most Greek children are at least third-generation residents of Montreal, they easily meet this requirement. Some Indian, Sri Lankan, and Pakistani children, who are "one-and-a-half" generation (born in South Asia but educated in Canada) and second generation, also meet this requirement if they have lived elsewhere in Canada or if they have attended an English-medium private school for a short time. This so-called loophole in the Charter of the French Language has been the subject of political debate over several decades.

16. For Indians, the presence of $[\gamma]$ rather than $[l]$ is a major factor in determining if an utterance counts as pure, or literary, Tamil. At the American Institute of Indian Studies in Madurai, my teachers often commented that a person becomes an expert in Tamil only after he or she learns to correctly pronounce this literary phoneme.

17. Mala explained to me that she speaks in European French because she likes to hang out with Arab friends who also speak in this style. She had even spent a few months in France with relatives the previous year to improve her accent. Mala is currently enrolled in a French-medium college and claims to be the only Sri Lankan Tamil in Montreal to voluntarily pursue higher education in French.

18. The school board official at the Commission scolaire Marguerite Bourgeoys claims that most high-ranking francophone officials send their children to English-medium private schools. Also, many anglophone elites send their children to French-immersion schools.

19. Réginald Fleury, the PELO director at the Commission scolaire de Montréal, notes that just under half of all newly enrolled preschool children in heritage language classes are Tamil and Hindi speakers (Ministère de l'Éducation, de Loisir et du Sport du Québec 2008).

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