The Talk of Tamils in Multilingual Montreal: A Study of Intersecting Language Ideologies in Nationalist Quebec

Sonia Das
University of Michigan

Abstract

In Montreal, racial, caste, socioeconomic, and gender inequalities are often masked as neutral-seeming linguistic differences of dialect, register, and accent. These sociolinguistic hierarchies are upheld by intersecting language ideologies, or essentialised beliefs about language use and ethnic identity. Quebec nationalist and multicultural policies endorse language ideologies of linguistic purity and sociolinguistic compartmentalisation to depict a cohesive nation while maintaining its racial and ethnic distinctions. Similarly, Montreal Tamil diaspora leaders encourage different Tamil-speaking groups to participate in sociolinguistically segregated domains to preserve purist linguistic standards and maintain socioeconomic, caste, and gender distinctions. Heritage language programmes reproduce these language-based distinctions for differentiating between types of Québécois citizens, while Montreal Tamil youth selectively challenge or endorse such prescriptions to produce a range of social identities and linguistic practices that correspond to their experiences as ethnic and racial minorities.

Introduction

Since the 1970s, Quebec politicians, intellectuals, and media have debated how to best standardise citizens' linguistic practices and regiment their social identities so as to discursively depict a cohesive Quebec nation. Crucial to this project have been efforts to interpret the linguistic practices of Montreal's multiethnic populations as fitting within the dominant

nationalist regime. The synchronised emergence of legislation on public language use and funding for heritage language education in the late 1970s signalled the Quebec state's first attempt to reach a political compromise concerning its nationalist and multicultural goals (Lemco 1992; Helly 1996; McAndrew 1991). Undergirding this political compromise are several intersecting language ideologies, or essentialised beliefs about language, that have enforced the general population's interpretation of language use and ethnic identity as sociologically coterminous. These language ideologies have predisposed Montreal residents to conceal from public view any non-purist multilingual practices (such as code-switching and code-mixing in French, English, and/or another language) and to participate in sociolinguistically segregated institutions. Correspondingly, Quebec's citizenry has been neatly differentiated into the mutually exclusive categories of francophone, anglophone, or allophone, with each group expected to participate in exclusively francophone, anglophone, or allophone institutions.

Similarly, religious and political leaders of Montreal's Tamil diasporas have encouraged Tamil-speaking groups to participate in sociolinguistically segregated domains in order to maintain purist standards for the Tamil language. Tamil-speaking groups are differentiated according to ethno-national (Indian Tamil versus Sri Lankan Tamil), gender, caste (Brahmin versus lower caste), and socioeconomic (upper-middle versus lower-middle class) status[1] each of which is further associated with a particular linguistic style and/or ability. Non-purist multilingual practices by Tamil youth (such as code-switching or code-mixing between different Tamil linguistic styles as well as with French and English) are perceived as disrupting the compartmentalisation of Tamil, French, and English linguistic varieties and interrupting the social reproduction of power in Quebec and its Tamil diasporas.

Although linguists are just now starting to analyse non-purist multilingual practices by Montreal youth,[2] in general such acts of multilingualism have been mostly erased from public discourse. In my attempt to resurrect the linguistic complexity of this socio-political landscape, I argue that the talk of Tamils in multilingual Montreal is both reinforcing and challenging the basic ideological premises of Québécois and Tamil nationalisms. According to the linguistic anthropological view of 'language as social action', power relations are understood to be forged and concealed in the details of linguistic phenomena (Kroskrity 2000). Contemporary diaspora studies in linguistic anthropology investigate how boundaries between language forms, practices, and speakers are constituted and disrupted in the attempt

to uncover the political and moral consequences of sociolinguistic hierarchies for minority and majority citizens (Bailey 2000; Eisenlohr 2006; Heller 1999; Rampton 1995; Urciuoli 1991). In Montreal, racial, caste, socioeconomic, and gender inequalities are often masked as neutral-seeming linguistic differences of dialect, register, and accent, thus producing hierarchically ranked sociolinguistic types among its citizenry.

Beliefs that postulate a one-to-one relationship between language use and social identity are examples of ethno-nationalist language ideologies (Kroskrity 2000; Silverstein 2000). Irvine and Gal have identified three semiotic processes through which such language ideologies arise: (1) rhematisation,[3] where indexical sign relations are mistakenly interpreted as iconic relations, (2) fractal recursivity, where existing oppositions in roles or activities are projected onto different social or linguistic levels, and (3) erasure, where persons and activities inconsistent with the dominant ideology are rendered invisible (Gal 2005; Irvine and Gal 2000). Irvine and Gal also suggest that social agents can manipulate these semiotic processes to create politically or morally advantageous representations of language and social identity. By paying close attention to the political and ethnographic context through which language ideologies arise, linguistic anthropologists have been able to explicate how linguistic issues articulate with ethno-national interests (Blommaert and Verchueren 1998, Milroy 2000, Philips 2000, Watts 1999). In this paper, I identify how Québécois nationalists and Tamil diaspora leaders are cultivating iconic sign relationships, recursively projecting them onto different social and linguistic levels, and erasing the appearance of non-purist multilingual activities through government-sponsored projects of Tamil heritage language education.

Heritage Language Education and the Quebec State

In 1978 the Ministry of Quebec, under the directive of the newly elected *Parti Québécois* government, announced the establishment of a state-funded heritage language programme, the PELO (*Programme d'enseigne-ment des langues d'origine*). Designed to promote multiculturalism in Quebec, this programme was also introduced to appease minority voters outraged by the passage of Bill 101 one year earlier. Bill 101 stipulated that all children in Quebec must attend French-medium schools unless a parent or sibling had previously attended English-medium school in Canada. Since its introduction in 1978, the PELO has quickly garnered the approval of minority parents and community leaders throughout Montreal and has expanded from its original course offerings in Greek, Italian, and

Portuguese to a more extensive selection of Arabic, Spanish, Hebrew, Algonquin, Mandarin, Vietnamese, Laotian, Punjabi, Bengali, Urdu, Hindi, and Tamil language classes (McAndrew 1991).

My interviews with PELO directors at the English Montreal School Board and the *Commission Scolaire de Montréal* revealed that both are well versed with the following literature on heritage language education (Association Canadienne d'Éducation 1991; Azzam 1986; Cummins 1983; Fleury 1999; Globesnky and Azzam 1987; McAndrew & Gress-Azzam 1987) and multilingual language acquisition (Bhullar 1988). Upon closer inspection, however, it becomes apparent that these particular studies selectively uphold ideological positions favourable to the institutionalisation of Québécois nationalism. This includes the perspective that heritage language classes do not interfere with the acquisition and use of the majority language, a point of view that seeks to appease societal anxieties about the impending *dé-francisation* of Montreal by non-French-speaking minority youth (Econosult 1981). Another ideological bias in these studies concerns their use of the concept of 'heritage language' (or '*langue d'origine*'[4]) to suggest that language functions as a repository for cultural heritage. The discursive origins of this post-Enlightenment concept can be tentatively traced back to Herder's address to his fellow German tribesmen in 1771 (Olender 1992). According to Herder, even socio-politically differentiated or dispersed tribes such as eighteenth-century German speakers can claim to possess a unified ethno-national identity on the basis of their speaking a common language. According to twentieth- and twenty-first-century Québécois nationalists, the public use of French similarly signifies a unified Québécois national identity.

The official rise of linguistic nationalism in Quebec in the 1960s–1970s can be largely attributed to the work of artists and intellectuals during the period of the Quiet Revolution. From Pierre Vallières' (1968) endorsement of Québécois joual as the most authentic language of the nation to Michele Lalonde's (1979) condemnation of English-speaking capitalists as cultural imperialists, these French-writing and French-speaking playwrights, poets, and journalists strived to overturn pro-English linguistic and socioeconomic hierarchies in Montreal. Also during this time, Québécois nationalists founded separate cultural and financial institutions for French-speaking Québécois, thus sanctioning the compartmentalisation of sociolinguistic domains as the state's preferred mode of governance (see Kroskrity 1998). The transformation of Montreal's Catholic and Protestant school boards into French and English school boards in the 1990s was a crucial component to this process of sociolinguistic compartmentalisation. Furthermore through

their participation in nationalised institutions, French Canadians began to self-ascribe as 'Québécois' or 'francophones' (i.e. French speakers) while English-Canadians began to self-ascribe as 'Canadians' or 'anglophones' (i.e. English speakers).

In the current aftermath of the second failed referendum on Quebec secession in 1995, this state-sponsored language ideology of compartmentalised sociolinguistic domains has begun to show signs of strain. Even though most people in Quebec continue to believe that the use of French iconically signifies a speaker's Québécois ethnicity, others have pointed to the fact that many racial and ethnic minorities in Montreal also speak French fluently. Bill 101, which enforces the use of French as Quebec's official language, has produced a significant number of native or second-language French speakers among its minority populations (Béland 1999). However most minorities, once referred to as 'allophones' (speakers of a different language) and now increasingly referred to as 'néo-Québécois' (new Québécois), are racially and/or ethnically differentiated from the 'Québécois de souche' (Québécois of old stock) by virtue of their participation in diaspora or state heritage language institutions.

Heritage language programmes such as the PELO uphold language-based distinctions for differentiating between ethnic and racialised types of Québécois citizens. First each allophone group is attributed a heritage language identity that is institutionally reinforced through matching heritage language classes. Second, heritage language teachers emphasise to their students the importance of learning their 'heritage language' or 'mother tongue' in order to understand their cultural heritage. This reproduces an iconic interpretation of the relationship between language, culture, and ethnicity. Heritage language students also learn that the public usage of Québécois French, a purified and elite variety of Canadian French, marks their civic identity as a resident of Quebec. On the other hand the usage of Québécois *joual*, a non-purist and non-elite variety of Canadian French, is believed to be the heritage language of the Québécois de souche ethnic group. These semiotic orchestrations by Quebec policy-makers and heritage language teachers demonstrate the manner in which representations of linguistic heterogeneity can be discursively regimented to articulate with ethno-national interests.

Tamil Migration and Language Politics

It is against this sociopolitical context that the linguistic activities of Montreal's Tamil diasporas must be evaluated. Montreal is home to

approximately 20,000–30,000 Sri Lankan Jaffna Tamils, most of who were admitted to Canada as refugees after the onset of the Sri Lankan civil war in 1983. Many Sri Lankan Tamils currently reside in lower-middle class neighbourhoods in multiethnic districts of Montreal. There is also a much smaller number (~2,000–3,000) of Indian Tamils, Malaysian Tamils, South African Tamils, and French Tamils currently living in Montreal. Most of these immigrants sought entry as highly educated professionals in the 1960s through1980s and currently live in upper-middle class suburbs of Montreal (Statistics Canada 2001). Given their common heritage language, all Tamil-speaking immigrants and descendants are presumed by the general Quebec population to constitute a single and homogeneous ethnolinguistic group, despite their varying regions of origin. In contrast Montreal's Tamil-speaking population instead emphasises its divergent ethno-national identities, such as Sri Lankan Tamil or Indian Tamil; religious identities, such as Tamil Catholics or Tamil Hindus; caste identities, such as Brahmins or Vellālas; or even socioeconomic status. By creating separate institutional complexes for these various Tamil sub-groups, Tamil diaspora leaders have succeeded in ideologically de-emphasising their linguistic commonalities and ideologically emphasising their national, religious, caste, and socioeconomic distinctions.

My first meeting with Muthu, the president of Concordia University Tamil Mantram (CUTAM), alluded to this state of affairs. Muthu explained that Concordia University has separate Tamil organisations: for Indian Tamils, Indian Students Association and Tamilagam, and for Sri Lankan Tamils, CUTAM. Given the close proximity between Tamil Nadu and the Tamil-speaking regions of Sri Lanka (less than 24 kilometres at one locale), not to mention their extensive transnational flows in media, art, commerce, people, capital, and political ideology, it can come as a surprise to learn that there is little social intermingling between Indian Tamils and Sri Lankan Tamils in Montreal. Yet Lee and Rajoo (1987) have previously noted how higher-caste and upper-class Chettiar Sri Lankan Tamil merchants and Vellālar Sri Lankan Tamil landlords in southeast Asia have strategically segregated themselves from lower-caste and lower-class Indian Tamil indentured labourers, while Daniel and Thangaraj (1995) have noted how earlier and wealthier waves of Sri Lankan Tamil migrants in Britain have strategically segregated themselves from later and less wealthy waves of Sri Lankan Tamil refugees. Given these trends, what is particularly unusual about the Montreal Tamil diaspora is that the institutional segregation of upper-middle class Brahmin Indian Tamils and lower/middle class Vellālar Sri Lankan Tamils is often explained in terms of linguistic and not status differences. Thus, Indian Tamil Hindus and Sri Lankan Tamil Hindus are

said to attend different temples and religious celebrations because of dialectal ethno-national rather than caste differences, while Indian Tamil and Sri Lankan Tamil youth are said to participate in separate social networks because of linguistic rather than socioeconomic differences.

By compartmentalising Tamil cultural and religious activities into Sri Lankan versus Indian domains, the purity and hierarchical rank of each social group or class is maintained. Similarly, the purity of the Tamil language is preserved by compartmentalising its linguistic varieties into different sociolinguistic personas. 'Diglossia' is a linguistic concept commonly used by Tamils to describe the functional differentiation of a prestigious and purist register of literary Tamil from impure, low-status, colloquial registers of Tamil (Britto 1986). In Montreal, Indian Tamil and Sri Lankan Tamil linguistic styles are sometimes described as being positioned in a diglossic relation with each other. The less truncated syntax of colloquial Sri Lankan Tamil is commonly interpreted as iconically resembling that of literary Tamil. Hence some Indian Tamils believe that Sri Lankan Tamils actually speak 'written Tamil'. In contrast, Sri Lankan Tamils interpret the written-like quality of their speech as a sign of its linguistic purity. They instead regard colloquial Indian Tamil, with its relatively more truncated syntax, Hindi-influenced phonology, and English lexicon, as an impure form of 'spoken Tamil'.

Even though there is a lack of sociolinguistic research on Sri Lankan Tamil varieties, most existing research on modern Tamil variation emphasises the relatedness of all Tamil languages. In the early nineteenth century, colonial philologists postulated the common origins of Tamil and other south Indian languages as belonging to a Dravidian language family (Trautmann 2006). Henceforth, colonial and post-colonial Tamil scholars have regarded the various caste and regional styles of modern Tamil as a unitary whole, collectively unified in their genealogical relationship to the pure, classical Tamil progenitor. Literary Tamil, a language used for writing and formal speech events, is believed to most closely resemble this classical Tamil style. In Tamil Nadu, twentieth-century nationalists personified pure Tamil *(centamil)* as both mother figure and goddess *(taymoli)* in order to elicit sentiments of language devotion among citizens (Ramaswamy 1997). In northern Sri Lanka, twentieth-century Tamil nationalists depicted Jaffna Tamil as a purist, literary-like, colloquial language capable of iconically signifying a homogeneous Sri Lankan Tamil ethnicity (Rajan 1995). In both regions, non-purist styles of colloquial Tamil, which are seen as indexing caste, religious, regional, and socioeconomic distinctions, do not significantly disrupt the reproduction of the Tamil nation.

Yet within the sociopolitical context of Montreal's Tamil diasporas, the unifying function of the literary Tamil language has been eclipsed by the divisive function of its regional and caste vernaculars. Indian Tamils in Montreal identify more closely with their regional or caste dialect than with the purist literary Tamil style. In general Indian Tamil children and youth are taught to speak their regional and caste dialect through home socialisation or private tutoring. On the other hand, Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora leaders insist upon maintaining purist standards for speaking Jaffna Tamil among second generation youth. Through the use of government funds, several Sri Lankan Tamil PELO schools and diaspora schools have been established for children and youth to study literary Tamil and the purist Jaffna Tamil style. As a result the 'diglossic compartmentalisation' of Tamil language education, such that Indian Tamil youth are being taught a non-purist colloquial language and Sri Lankan Tamil youth are being taught purist literary-like languages, has produced a complementary division of labour in the reproduction of Tamil sociolinguistic hierarchies in Montreal.

Tamil Language Learning in the Montreal Diaspora

Four years ago, leaders and educators from different sites in the transnational Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora convened to draft a standardised syllabus for the Tamil language education of 'western' Sri Lankan Tamil children. Recognising that children of refugees living in countries such as Canada, France, Denmark, Norway, and Australia have different educational objectives and linguistic skills to master than children living in India or Sri Lanka, it was deemed necessary to develop pedagogical materials adapted to their multilingual and multicultural experiences. A teacher's guide, student workbook, and yearly exam were designed for grade levels one through ten. Beginning with developing vocabulary skills and practicing proper pronunciation in the early grades, then learning the Tamil script and grammatical rules in the middle grades, and finally focusing on reading comprehension and writing composition in the later grades, all lessons were designed to be executed in Tamil yet adapted to the cultural environment of the host society. Currently every Sunday afternoon, approximately 100 to 150 Sri Lankan Tamil Hindu children attend Tamil language class at either the Thiru Murugan temple in Dollard-des-Ormeaux, while another 100 to 150 Sri Lankan Tamil Catholic children attend Tamil language class at the Our Lady of Deliverance mission church in Montreal. In addition, there are five Tamil PELO classes offered by the French and English public school boards of Montreal.

Comparatively, Indian Tamils have been much less active in establishing Tamil-medium institutions in Montreal. Even though Indian Tamil parents try to socialise their children to speak Tamil, they choose to do so through more informal tactics or venues. There is currently one Indian Tamil elder in Montreal who offers private Tamil lessons to Indian Tamil children. He has even designed his own series of 'Spoken Tamil' textbooks for this task (Krishnan 2004). For the most part, however, parents teach their children to speak and, sometimes, read and write Tamil through the use of textbooks and multimedia purchased in India. Many Indian Tamil families also enrol their children in English-medium private schools, thus bypassing Bill 101's requirement that most immigrant children attend French-medium public schools. As a general rule, Indian Tamil children do not participate in Sri Lankan Tamil language schools, and vice versa. According to one young Indian Tamil couple, Lalitha and Mohan, sending their children to Tamil PELO classes would amount to a significant drop in socioeconomic status. Mohan states:

> The Tamil PELO teaches Sri Lankan Tamil, which in our opinion is a completely different language. Moreover, Tamil PELO classes are offered in schools where the student body is mostly low-income. Indian Tamils live in the suburbs and send their children to schools where there are less Tamils, not enough to make up an entire PELO class.

An analysis of Indian Tamil teaching materials further reveals this group's identification as an upper-middle class intelligentsia. All individuals engaged in the manufacturing of pedagogical materials are computer science and engineering professionals, sometimes even doctorates, and their products are tailored towards individuals with adequate technological and financial assets. For example, CD-ROMs and websites that offer Tamil tutorials presuppose the possession of home computer technology. Private Tamil lessons, which are taught at the price of $20 CAD per class, are similarly available only to those with adequate financial resources.

Given that colloquial Indian Tamil is considered to be less pure in form than colloquial Sri Lankan Tamil, one begins to notice an inverted relationship between criteria of linguistic purity and socioeconomic status in the Montreal Tamil diaspora. When considering that the ability to mix Tamil with English is taken to be a sign of socioeconomic prestige for Indian Tamils (and particularly for Brahmin Tamils) (Annamalai 1989), the decision to not send their children to Sri Lankan Tamil PELO schools,

where a purist register of Tamil is taught, and to instead enrol their children in English-medium private schools, where the prestigious language is taught, becomes comprehensible. To maintain their status as the higher caste and upper-class Tamil group in Montreal, Indian Tamils like Mohan may even emphasise linguistic differences to the extent that they proclaim the existence of two distinct languages, Indian Tamil and Sri Lankan Tamil. Other Indian Tamils may attempt to deflect negative stereotypes commonly associated with Sri Lankan Tamils in Montreal, including stereotypes of terrorism, crime, and poverty (Côte 2004; Falardeau 1996; Laroche 1997; Soulié 1987; Tasso 1986; Trudel 1999), by asserting only their Indian rather than Tamil identity.

At the Indian Tamil Deepavali celebration at Concordia University in October 2005, frequent reminders from audience members *to tamil pēsunka*! ('speak in Tamil') suggest that their valorisation of English and the de-valorisation of Sri Lankan Tamil is far from uncontested. The prominence of Tanglish speaking (Tamil-English code-mixing) or mono-lingual English-speaking second generation children is viewed with alarm by some members of this diaspora. In fact, Indian Tamils sympathetic to the goals of Tamil nationalism and cognisant of the attractive pull of English among the second generation will sometimes laud the fluency and purity with which first and second generation Sri Lankan Tamils speak. Also, because many Indian Tamils incorrectly believe that Sri Lankan Tamils speak literary Tamil, some presume that the latter group is better equipped to safeguard the language in its pristine, original state. In contrast colloquial Indian Tamil, which has been significantly modified by English and Hindi lexicon, phonology, and syntax, is considered to possess a less suitable grammatical structure upon which to base the language's future state.

By compartmentalising the responsibility for preserving the purity of the Tamil language upon Sri Lankan Tamils and maintaining the prestige of the Tamil language upon Indian Tamils, a template for the asymmetrical division of language labour is generated. Ironically, the burden of defending the purity of Tamil from foreign influences is shouldered by a socioeconomically marginal group whose status would improve if more members fluently spoke English or French. Nonetheless, Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora leaders readily assume this task because claims of Tamil linguistic purity are integral to their ongoing nationalist movement in Sri Lanka. Consequently economically mobile Indian Tamils in Montreal, secure in the knowledge that their language is safe under the protective ministering of Sri Lankan Tamils, are free to experiment with linguistic code-mixing to

learn additional languages to expand their repertoires, and to exploit new socioeconomic opportunities.

Gender inequalities, which cut across both Indian and Sri Lankan Tamil diasporas, reflect an additional asymmetry in this division of language labour. In the previously mentioned cultural show, two Indian Tamil students performed a humorous skit in which the brother speaks in Tanglish to his elder sister, who in turn responds in a purist Tamil style. The sister, in an Indian-accented Tamil, attempts to educate her younger brother about cultural traditions associated with the Hindu holiday Deepavali. The brother, in a Canadian-accented Tamil-English mix, good-naturedly admits his cultural ignorance of Deepavali and jokes about his preference for North American popular culture. In South Asian societies, the cultural and linguistic socialisation of children is customarily delegated to women. In fact the term 'mother tongue,' common in both academic and popular South Asian discourse, implies that first language acquisition occurs primarily through the mother–child relationship (Pattanayak 1981). An elder sister, who in this skit is acting like a second mother, is also expected to participate in the socialisation of her younger siblings. This language ideology, which envisions women as biologically predisposed to bear the disproportionate burden of linguistic and cultural reproduction, is prevalently endorsed in Montreal's Tamil diasporas. For example Selva-mani, the eldest sister of the Sri Lankan Tamil Sivapillai family, volunteers to weekly tutor her younger siblings, cousins, and neighbours in French. Similarly, Mohan testifies to the dramatic improvement in his conversa-tional fluency in Tamil after marrying Lalitha, a second generation Indian Tamil woman who only speaks to her parents in Tamil.

By naturalising the role of women in the language socialisation of children, the actual extent of women's labour is rendered invisible. The result of this erasure is that Tamil women are discouraged from participating in public and more prestigious linguistic activities. This asymmetry is evident in the institutional gender dynamics of Tamil language education. While most participants of Tamil heritage language programmes are female teachers and students, much of the recognition and prestige for pedagogical and scholastic achievements in Tamil are disproportionately garnered by male teachers and students. All pedagogical materials, such as workbooks, grammar books, CD-ROMs, websites, and teaching manuals, have been produced and authored by men. For example, the standardised Tamil PELO curriculum guide that is used in both French and English public schools was authored by a male PELO teacher. He is the only male Tamil PELO teacher out of five total PELO teachers in Montreal. Similarly at the Thiru

Murugan temple and Our Lady of Deliverance church Tamil schools, women teach lower grade levels, where female students tend to be the most active participants, while males teach higher grade levels, where male students tend to be the most active participants. Furthermore, Our Lady of Deliverance has a youth group that is almost entirely composed of young men between the ages of 14 and 20. These young men receive recognition for assisting Tamil language teachers, writing Tamil poetry, and performing special duties for the clergy. Collectively, this evidence suggests that gender inequalities are also being reproduced through the linguistic activities of second generation children and youth in the Montreal Tamil diasporas.

Non-purist Multilingual Practices of Tamil Youth

Not all second generation Tamil youth in Montreal are reproducing social hierarchies through their linguistic practices. The following ethnographic vignette describes the experiences of four Sivapillai siblings whose eclectic multilingual practices and social identities are challenging the underlying ethno-national language ideologies of the Quebec state and the Montreal Tamil diaspora. The Sivapillais' variable and un-standardised code-mixing and code-switching practices and ethnic/racial identifications attest to a de-coupling in the iconic link between language use and social identity. Their linguistic practices also point to the emergence of a new language ideology, one which emphasises the mutable boundaries between linguistic forms, practices, and speakers.

Selvamani, the eldest sister of this family, previously attended French-medium primary and secondary school, English-medium college, and English-medium university in Montreal. Born in Sri Lanka, she first immigrated with her family to an Indian refugee camp in the early 1980s and later to Montreal's Côte-des-Neiges neighbourhood in the mid-1980s. Selvamani identifies first as Indian and second as Québécois, but never as Sri Lankan. She speaks French, English, and Tamil fluently and writes English and French fluently. She is accustomed to code-switching and code-mixing between Québécois French, Québécois joual, English, and/or Tamil with her friends, between Québécois joual and Tamil with her younger sister, and between Québécois joual, English, and Tamil with her younger brothers. Her younger sister, Mala, speaks almost entirely in Québécois French or Tamil and does not code-mix. She attended primary school, secondary school, and now college in French and identifies as a francophone and South Asian Hindu. Mala's younger brother, Dileepan, mostly code-switches between Québécois French and black stylised

English. He is equally fluent in both languages, French and English, and has attended French-medium primary school and is now attending English-medium secondary school. Dileepan closely identifies with other non-white racial minorities who live in his neighbourhood, particularly those of South Asian and Caribbean descent. The youngest brother, Mani, has recently switched from English to French primary school, although he prefers to speak, read, and write in English. All four siblings previously attended Tamil language class at a Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora organization, but none pursued this education beyond a few grade levels. Currently only Selvamani can read and write a little bit of Tamil.

Not surprisingly, experiences such as the Sivapillai siblings' are not often represented in Québécois or Tamil nationalist discourse. By selectively challenging or endorsing ideologies of linguistic purity and sociolinguistic compartmentalisation, these siblings have collectively invented a range of social identities and linguistic practices that correspond to their needs as minority citizens of Quebec. First, Selvamani's and Dileepan's intra-sentential and inter-sentential code-mixing in English, French, and/or Tamil violates the principles of linguistic purism integral to both Québécois and Tamil nationalisms. It is thus impossible to classify either sister or brother as a francophone, anglophone, or allophone based solely on linguistic criteria. Dileepan is particularly aware of the racialised dimensions of Quebec's sociolinguistic classificatory system, as he most closely identifies with other racialised or 'visible minorities' (Buchignani 1980) in his neighbourhood. Also, the fact that Selvamani does not even identify as Sri Lankan underscores the extent to which the purist prescriptions of Montreal's Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora leaders have little influence on her social and linguistic choices. Second, the fact that Selvamani, Dileepan, and Mani can easily transfer between French- and English-medium schools challenges the most important objective of Bill 101 – to ensure that second generation immigrants preferentially live, work, and study in French. Recently, Pauline Marois of the *Parti Québécois* has proposed that Bill 101 be revised to oblige many pre-university students to also attend French-medium institutions (Dutrisac 2008). As of yet, this proposal has not been endorsed by the Liberal Party, the political party currently in power. At the same time, Selvamani's and Dileepan's valorisation of non-standard French and English styles, such as Québécois joual and black stylised English, must be measured against Mala's valorisation of purist French and Tamil styles. Their differing stances toward linguistic purity and sociolinguistic compartmentalisation demonstrate that the work of ideological reproduction, as well as contestation, is always partial and uneven.

The talk of Tamils in multilingual Montreal is thus a polysemic phenomenon which requires an understanding of ethnographic and linguistic forms as emergent processes rather than purified entities. Most recently, the Quebec state has appointed the Bouchard-Taylor commission to host public debates throughout the province concerning the reasonable accommodation of ethnic and religious minorities. Hérouxville, a small rural town of 1,338 Québécois de souche inhabitants, made public headlines when its residents presented the commission with a '*code de vie*' banning (mostly Islamic) religious practices from public town life (Girard 2007). Many Québécois, including the premier, have since castigated the actions of the people of Hérouxville (Perreault 2007; Presse Canadienne 2007). Hérouxville's critics include the comedy troupe *Rock et belles Oreilles*, whose show *Bye Bye 2007* enacted an imaginary encounter between a French-speaking Muslim couple and a suspicious Hérouxville man who mistakes the couple for a Tamil family (Soleil 2008). In Quebec, the word '*tamoul*' has come to signify the most foreign of all immigrants, suggesting their marginal inclusion in Québécois society. By disembodying and disambiguating the semiotic relationships between linguistic, racial, and other cultural signs pertaining to Montreal Tamils, this article seeks to shed light on the inclusionary and exclusionary processes which characterise contemporary nationalist politics in multilingual and multi-ethnic Quebec.

Notes

[1] The socioeconomic status of Sri Lankan Tamils in Montreal often differs from their socioeconomic status in Sri Lanka. Due to casualties of war, many Sri Lankan Tamil refugees have lost property and possessions in the act of fleeing from Sri Lanka. Upon entering Canada, many more refugees have found that their university degrees are not recognised as fully accredited according to Canadian standards. For these reasons, most Sri Lankan Tamil refugees in Montreal have experienced a significant drop in socioeconomic status.

[2] Patricia Lamarre of the Université de Montréal and Kathleen Riley of Concordia University are currently conducting sociolinguistic research on Montreal youth multilingual behavior. Both of them presented preliminary results of their research at the 2008 CASCA conference.

[3] In Gal (2005), she explains how 'rhematisation' is a more accurate label than 'iconisation' (Irvine and Gal 2000).

[4] The Association Canadienne d'Éducation explains the term '*langue d'origine*'*:*

> *La langue maternelle, la langue première, la langue d'un parent et de ses ancêtres, la langue de la minorité ou la langue d'ethnique s'appelle communément la 'langue d'origine'. Toutefois, le concept n'est pas facile à définir: nous avons constaté qu'on adopte souvent la définition proclamée par le Ministère de l'Éducation de l'Ontario, soit 'toute langue autre que le français ou l'anglais'* (Association Canadienne d'Éducation 1991: 3).

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Sonia Das is finishing her PhD in Linguistic Anthropology at the University of Michigan in August 2008. Her dissertation is entitled 'Between Text and Talk: Expertise, Normativity, and Scales of Belonging in the Montreal Tamil Diasporas'. It examines divergent efforts by Tamil-speaking minorities from India and Sri Lanka to belong to diasporic, nationalist, and/or globalising spatiotemporal scales within Montreal, Quebec. In the analysis, she describes how language ideologies of 'expertise' and 'normativity' are inscribed in the different material forms, genres, and styles of 'text' and 'talk' used in religious or secular institutional settings. In September 2008, Sonia Das will join the faculty at the Department of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia as a post-doctoral teaching fellow. There she will teach the courses 'Introduction to Cultural Anthropology' and 'Global Cities and Diasporas'.