

A Special SAAL 20th Anniversary Issue

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SAAL 20th ANNIVERSARY SPECIAL ISSUE

TWENTY YEARS ON: SAAL 1985-2005

Ho Wah Kam
SAAL Patron

The First 10 Years

How It All Started

It was in 1984 that Mary Tay mooted the idea of starting an association for applied linguistics, and before long she was working very hard to prepare for its launch. The launch itself was not exactly, as they say, a media event but it was an occasion that many had been looking forward to. And to give the association its legitimate status as a professional organization, it was duly registered on the 13th August 1985.

Mary had decided to call the new body the Singapore Association for Applied Linguistics or SAAL for short, and why not? SAAL rhymes nicely with the names of its affiliates in different parts of the world.- for example, AAAL in the US, BAAL in Britain, CAAL in Canada, GAAL in Greece, HAAL in Hong Kong, and MAAL in Moscow, and many more. Like SAAL, they are all related by affiliation to the central body of AILA (Association Internationale de Linguistique Appliquée) based in the US then.

Over the years, there has been so much development and diversification of interests within SAAL, that it would be quite difficult in a short piece such as this to tell the full story of SAAL's growth and development, but I will try.

As soon as SAAL was gazetted, a pro-tem committee (see Box 1) was formed and it met for the first time on 14 September 1985. As with most projects of this type, there were some teething problems, but Mary knew exactly what to do, persevered and led the way.

The blessings of three international scholars in the fields of linguistics and applied linguistics helped somewhat. I remember it was Professor Braj Kachru from the US who was the first to give the idea of forming SAAL his firm support. He was here in January 1985, sharing with Mary and a few of us his experience in starting up professional organizations of this type. Sir

Reflections on English Language Teaching or RELT (Chief Editor: T. Ruanni F. Tupas), an international journal of the Centre for English Language Communication, National University of Singapore, invites contributions to its upcoming issues. RELT aims to explore the range of issues of current concern to those who teach and do research in the field of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) or as a Second Language (ESL) in Asia and other regions.

Its strong Editorial Advisory Board includes the following names: Desmond Allison, Neil J. Anderson, Maria Lourdes Bautista, Vijay K. Bhatia, Tom Hutchinson, Ryuko Kubota, B Kumaravadivelu, Diane Larsen-Freeman, Jun Liu, Allan Luke, Alison Mackey, Peter Martin, Paul Kei Matsuda, David Nunan, Rebecca Oxford, Samuel Moses, Amy B.M. Tsui, Brian Tomlinson, and Mark Warschauer.

Website: <http://www.nus.edu.sg/celc/publications/reflections.htm>

STETS Language & Communication Review (Chief Editor: Deng Xudong) is published twice a year. It includes articles written by both local and international scholars concerning the teaching of English. The Review invites the submission of unpublished articles concerning aspects of the teaching and learning of English proficiency and communication skills relevant to tertiary institutions in Singapore and Southeast Asia.

Both full-length articles (between 1,500 and 6,000 words) and shorter items are welcome. Full-length articles may discuss syllabus and curriculum design, testing and evaluation, teacher training, pedagogy, classroom practices, computer-assisted language learning or other issues related to teaching and learning of English in tertiary education. They may be reports of original research, review articles, or bibliographic essays. The shorter items could be reviews of workshops (STETS-sponsored or otherwise); practical suggestions for good practice in the classroom; or book reviews.

Include an abstract (for full-length articles only), a 50-word author biography, and author's contact details with your submission.

Website: <http://www.stets.org.sg/stetspublications.htm>

Randolph Quirk visited SAAL on 14 January 1986, after it was formed, and spoke to the members; so did Professor M A K Halliday, somewhat later on 14 October 1986 and he expressed the same enthusiasm and optimism about "baby" SAAL. All three distinguished visitors gave their blessings and wished Mary and SAAL well.

SAAL's First ExCo

SAAL's first annual general meeting was held on 11 July 1986, and it was at that meeting that SAAL's first Executive Committee was elected into office (see Box 2). By then the size of SAAL's membership had increased to around 100.

Box 1 SAAL Protem Committee 1985–1986

Mary Tay (President)
Lim Kiat Boey (Vice-Pres)
Ho Wah Kam (Secretary)
Lee Kok Cheong (Treasurer)
Sally Low -- Shirley Lim
Robert Yeo -- Wong Yin Mee
Arthur Yap -- Amy Sobrielo

Change of Leadership at SAAL

Unfortunately, Mary had to leave SAAL in 1989 for very legitimate personal reasons (for further studies, in the first instance). She was in her second term of office as President. Rosemary Khoo as acting President continued the good work until the AGM and election in July of 1990.

Box 2 SAAL Executive Committee 1986–1988

Mary Tay (President)
Rosemary Khoo (V-Pres)
Christine Tan (Secretary)
Joyce James (Asst Sec)
Lee Kok Cheong (Treasurer)
Ann Pakir (Asst Treas)
Catherine Lim (Editor)
Robert Yeo Ho Wah Kam

Box 3 SAAL Executive Committee 1990–1992

Anne Parkir (President)
Rosemary Khoo (V-Pres)
Ng Chee Hian (Secretary)
Tony Hung (Asst Sec)
Vanithamani S (Treasurer)
Chua Chee Lay (Asst Treas)
Chua Seok Hong (Editor)
Mohsen Ghadessy
Shirley Williams
Abbas bin Mohd Shariff

A new team (see Box 3) was elected into office at the 1990 election, with Anne Pakir as President. Anne, a mirror-image of Mary, sharing the

attributes of zeal, leadership and decisiveness, has been at the helm as President from that date until 2004, when she stepped down as President and was appointed Advisor. In particular, at that election (1990), membership of the executive committee reflected very closely the multilingual nature of Singapore society, with one of its members lecturing in Malay Studies (Abbas bin Mohd Shariff) and another in Chinese Studies (Chua Chee Lay).

In addition, SAAL has benefited greatly from the goodwill and generosity of its patrons, firstly in the person of Mr. Earnest Lau who was then Director of RELC (1988-1992), and later (1992-2004) in Dr. Maurice Baker, a Pro-Chancellor of the National University of Singapore.

SAAL's Contributions for the First 10 Years

Four main features characterize SAAL's activities and contributions in the period 1985-1995: (a) the provision of talks given by colleagues from local institutions and visitors from abroad, (b) the establishment of the SAAL Lecture series, (c) the setting up a seminar series for school teachers, and (d) publications.

With regard to (a) above, the coverage has been wide in terms of topics and speakers. From among the local scholars, there were Anthea Gupta of NUS then, who spoke on Singapore Colloquial English and Standard English (17.2.1989), and from abroad, to name only two, Peter Strevens (from UK) on Fresh Models of the Language Learning/Language Teaching Process (15.4.1986) and Ian Malcolm (from Australia) on Second Thoughts on an Analysis of Discourse (16.10.1989).

This SAAL Lecture series (an idea suggested by Prof. Edwin Thumboo) began with the first SAAL Lecture given by Prof. M A K Halliday on 21 Feb 1991. Each SAAL Lecture (not confined to one a year) was an occasion for an internationally known and published scholar in the field of Applied Linguistics to share his/her thoughts on a topic of his/her choice with SAAL members and also members of the public. Other SAAL Lecturers included Prof. Jean Aitchison, who holds the Rupert Murdoch Professorship of Language and Communication at Oxford University, well known for her publications such as *Articulate Mammal* (3rd ed, 1989) and *Words in the Mind* (2nd ed, 1984), and Prof. Braj Kachru, who needs no introduction.

Another innovative move of the 1992/1994 Executive Committee was the decision to conduct a series of seminars/workshops for school teachers in

Language and Communications Centre, NTU

Candidates with at least a Master's degree in Applied Linguistics, Communication Studies or other related fields to teach courses in Communication Skills and Writing are invited to apply. Candidates must have experience in teaching communication skills to students at tertiary level, in addition to an excellent command of English.

Here is the link for the detailed job ad: <http://www.hss.ntu.edu.sg/career.asp>

Centre for English Language Communication, NUS

Applications are invited for appointment to Lectureships in the Centre for English Language Communication, NUS. Candidates must have at least a Master's degree in Applied Linguistics, TEFL/TESL, Technical Writing, English Communication Skills, Reading, Rhetoric and Composition, Computer-aided Language Learning or any other related field. Ideal candidates would have 1) at least three years of relevant teaching experience, especially at the tertiary level or with adult learners, 2) research interests in teaching-related areas, and 3) a record of publications and/or conference presentations in pedagogical research. Here is the link for the detailed job ad: <http://www.nus.edu.sg/celc/employment/index.htm>.

CALL FOR PAPERS

Pedagogies: An International Journal (Senior Editor: Allan Luke) brings together emergent and breaking work on all aspects of pedagogy: classroom teaching and learning in response to new communities and student bodies, curriculum and responses to new knowledge and changing disciplinarity, blends of traditional and new communications media in classrooms, and most importantly, how we might improve and renew the everyday work that teachers and students do in classrooms. It features quantitative and qualitative, disciplinary and transdisciplinary, empirical and theoretical work, and will include special editions on key developments in research on knowledge and pedagogy. It aims to push the boundaries of theory and research - to seek out new paradigms, models and ways of framing education - while at the same time keeping an eye squarely on that which matters: teaching and learning in classrooms.

Website: <http://www.crpp.nie.edu.sg/course/view.php?id=215>

- Saravanan V. (2000). A comparative study of the factors of SES, English Language Networks and Community Language networks in the linguistic behaviour of bilingual families in Singapore. In *Methodological Issues in Language Maintenance and Shift*. Edited by M. David & A. Ulrich. Berlin: Duisburger Arbeiten zur Sprach-und Kulturwissenschaft.
- Saravanan V. (2001). The Significance of Bilingual Chinese, Malay and Tamil Children's English Network Patterns on Community Language Use Patterns. *Early Child Development and Care* 166: 81-91.
- Saravanan V. & Seetha L. (2004). An examination of the corpus and status of Standard Spoken Tamil (SST) in the school and media domains in Singapore in order to establish SST as an additional resource for the teaching and learning of Tamil (CRP 06/04SL), CRPP, National Institute of Education, Singapore.
- Schiffman, H.F. (1995). Language Shift in the Tamil Communities of Malaysia and Singapore: the Paradox of Egalitarian Language Policy. *Southwest Journal of Linguistics* 14(1-2). Available on-line at <http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/~haroldfs/540/handouts/sparadox/sparadox.htm> 1.
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- Seetha L. (2001). The Contribution of the Mass Media to the Development of Tamil Language and Literature in Singapore. Unpublished PhD thesis: Nanyang Technological University.
- Seetha L. & Saravanan V. (2004). Standard Spoken Tamil- A Study. *Proceedings of World Tamil Teachers' Conference* (Chennai, 19-20 December 2004), pp. 103-106.
- Shegar C., R.A. Rahim (2005). Tamil language instruction in Singapore - preliminary report on findings of classroom pedagogical practices (CRP Core Project Panel 3). Presented at MOE's TLCPRC Committee on 25 May 2005.
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collaboration with the Professional Wing of the Singapore Teachers' Union under the banner title of *The English Language in Singapore*. The first such SAAL-STU seminar (20-21 Nov 1992), was conducted under the title of *The English Language in Singapore: Standards and Norms*, the second, *The English Language in Singapore: Implications for Teaching*, was held on 11-12 Nov 1993, and the third (on 17-18 March 1995) with the NUS Department of English Language and Literature as the third partner, was on the *Teaching of Writing*.

In terms of publications, the output has been relatively modest in the early days. The first issue of the *SAAL Newsletter* appeared in December 1987, which, after 19 issues, was replaced in 1993 by the *SAAL Quarterly*, sporting a new format and some new objectives.

The volume entitled *The English Language in Singapore: Issues and Development* by Mary Tay Wan Joo came out in 1993, and *The English Language in Singapore: Standards and Norms*, edited by Anne Pakir, appeared in the same year *Language, Society and Education in Singapore: Issues and Trends*, a comprehensive state-of-the-art study brought out by Times Academic Press, is almost a SAAL effort because three of the four co-editors and 12 of the 15 principal authors were active members of SAAL.

The easiest part of the overall SAAL effort was to write its constitution; the hardest part was to make the constitution work and to make the association grow. And grow it did, with the help of the right people. Mary, as SAAL's founding President, carefully nurtured its growth, but, as mentioned earlier, she had to leave SAAL in 1989 for further studies. For continuity, Mary's vision and her energy was maintained and further reinforced in the next 10 years of SAAL's existence by Anne Pakir.

The Next 10 Years

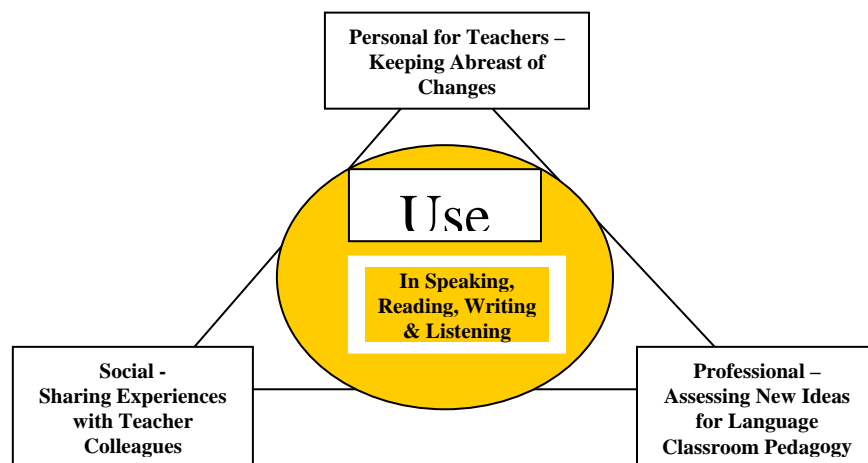
Two main developments characterized the work of the period (1995-2005): (a) Reaching out to schools and teachers, and (b) Reaching out to the world community of Applied Linguistics.

Reaching Out to Schools and Teachers.

The collaboration with the Professional Wing of the Singapore Teachers'

Union in providing professional upgrading for language teachers continued. In 1998, there was the joint SAAL-STU *Seminar on Reading in a Multilingual Context*, and there were also the symposia on teaching and use of Standard English, namely, *Teaching and Use of Standard English* (2000), *Teaching Internationally Acceptable Spoken English* (2001) and *English Language in Singapore: Changing Perspectives on Grammar in the Classroom* (2003), all of which were conducted under the banner title of *The English Language in Singapore*.

The professional development thrust for teachers of these SAAL-STU Symposia is best illustrated in the model below.



Reaching out to the World Community of Applied Linguistics

The highlight of the period 1995-2005 must be the successful hosting of AILA2002. *Association Internationale de Linguistic Appliquée* (AILA), to which SAAL and other national linguistic associations are affiliated, holds its World Congresses every three years in different locations. For example, Japan hosted it in 1999, and winning the bid in 1996 at the meeting in Finland, Singapore was given the honour of hosting it in 2002. Held at the SUNTEC Convention Centre (16-21 December), under the banner title of *Applied Linguistics in the 21st Century: Opportunities for Innovation and Creativity*, this 13th World Congress of Applied Linguistics was considered one the best ever held, from all accounts, and it set a benchmark for

- Pedagogy & Teacher Training
- Examinations & Assessment and
- Concerns of Tamil Language Community

Endnotes:

* I would like to acknowledge A/P Vanithamani Saravanan, CRPP&ELL, NIE/NTU for her assistance in preparing this paper.

**The project team comprises Dr. S. Gopinathan, Dr. Viniti Vaish, Dr Seetha Lakshmi, Dr Vanithamani Saravanan, Dr Sivakumaran, Dr Velmurugan, Dr M Thyagarajan and Mr Kalaimani from National Institute of Education

***Dr N Varaprasad is the chairman for this committee, Ministry of Education.

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- Saravanan V. (1998). Language Maintenance and Language Shift in the Tamil-English Community. In *Language, Society and Education in Singapore: Issues and Trends*, 2nd ed. Times Academic Press.
- Saravanan V. (1999). Bilingual Chinese, Malay and Tamil Children's Language Choices in a Multi-lingual Society. *Early Child Development and Care* 152: 43-54.

Written Tamil. Such SST could be used in formal situations such as in news, interviews, literary seminars, court, parliament and official meetings. Informal situations such as communicative functions within the family, in religious places, among friends and literary writing are ideal for using SST. Many of them said that it is good to use Standard Spoken Tamil in such appropriate situations. The respondents did not accept mixed codes in English and Tamil.

2.0 A Tamil Language Curriculum and Pedagogy Review Committee was set up to review the Tamil Language Curriculum and Pedagogy. The final report of the committee will be released in late August-September 2005. Currently two Review Committees set up to undertake a review of Tamil Language Curriculum and Pedagogy are working on their final reports. The first committee conducted a review on 'A Critical Review of the Tamil Language Syllabus and Recommendation for Revision in Singapore (CRP 36/03 SL)**' The second review committee was set up by the Ministry of Education. ***

Both committees have undertaken an extensive review of issues in teaching and learning Tamil language including strategies for developing a future generation of young speakers. The CRPP Tamil Curriculum Review project is guided by the following questions:

1. To what extent does the current syllabus in Tamil include different varieties of both spoken and written varieties and styles?
2. How can this current Tamil syllabus be revised, and more broadly, how can we envision a curriculum of the future keeping in mind the concerns of the community for the longevity of the Tamil language in Singapore?

The Ministry of Education's Tamil Review Committees' rationale of review is to ensure that the curriculum is:

- responsive
- current
- relevant and
- future-oriented

The main focus areas of this review committee are:

- Tamil Language Syllabus & Instructional Materials

organizational excellence, efficiency and hospitality.

SAAL in Perspective

The growth of SAAL is best seen against the larger picture of professional development and empowerment in the field of language and literature education in Singapore - the point has to be made that SAAL has not been alone in this venture. Currently, for example, the leadership of SAAL in the areas of language and literature teaching at the tertiary level is being shared with the Singapore Tertiary English Teachers Society (STETS) and, at the school system level, with the Society for Reading and Literacy (SRL) and with the English Language and Literature Teachers Association of Singapore (ELLTAS). Each in its own way has served as a clearinghouse for new ideas in applied linguistics and in language and literature pedagogy and also as a platform for the sharing of new experiences and perspectives. Collectively, the yearly conferences, seminars and workshops of these associations together with those of Regional Language Centre (RELC) have raised the level of critical awareness concerning language and language pedagogy of teachers and lecturers in the formal education system in Singapore.

Coda

This story of SAAL in the first 20 years of its existence is told to show how things must change to meet the changing needs of its clients, stakeholders and the system as a whole. SAAL's key words have always been "*being up-to-date*", "*adaptability*" and "*relevance*". Two examples should suffice to underscore this point. Firstly, on being up-to-date, the membership of SAAL's executive committees reflects a repository of expertise and scholarship earned in the powerhouses of linguistics and applied linguistics overseas, and this is true, too, of many of its members who have been highly trained in a cross-section of universities in the US, UK, Australia and New Zealand. The press for new knowledge and expertise is strong and unrelenting, and SAAL has had to respond to this press in some way. Secondly, on the point of relevance, SAAL has moved from the position of academics-talking-to-academics in a strongly academics-theoretical setting to that of academics working with school practitioners, and the benefits of this theory-practice interaction are intended to go both ways.

Looking back, then, it is clear that SAAL has changed very much for the better since 1985 and, given the nature of the world today, will continue to

change in the years ahead. The journey will most probably be tougher than it had been before and the terrain most uneven and challenging but SAAL, with a new leadership in place today and Chng Huang Hoon at the helm as President and Anne Pakir as Advisor, will continue to be productive and certainly prosper. I wish SAAL well.

The SAAL ANNIVERSARY DINNER: A report

Aileen O. Salonga
Department of English Language and Literature
National University of Singapore

The SAAL 20th anniversary dinner took place at the NUSS Guild House at Suntec City on 28 October 2005. The affair started with words of welcome from the SAAL President, Assoc Prof Chng Huang Hoon.

Dinner soon followed, and the guests were obviously delighted with the sumptuous buffet, one consisting of local food, and the other an international fare. The entertainment for the evening came from Prof Allan Luke and Dr Susan Wright who both delivered a touching and powerful musical performance.

As part of the night's reminiscences, Dr Ho Wah Kam, SAAL's patron, and Assoc Prof Anne Pakir, SAAL's immediate past president and current adviser, shared their memories of SAAL's earlier years and their hopes for SAAL's continued existence. Then, a ceremonial handover took place where the minutes of SAAL's meetings for the last ten years (1996-2005) were compiled and handed over by Assoc Prof Low Ee Ling, SAAL's Vice-President to the SAAL president. Associate Professor Chng then talked about the significance of the minutes not only in concretizing the effort and sacrifice of the members of the SAAL executive committee, but also in historicizing the organization's activities.

The affair ended with the raffle of the evening's top prizes. Interspersed in the program was a game of linguistic trivia where gifts were given away to guests who could answer questions about SAAL's history and certain linguistic concepts. The game definitely brought out a lot of happy SAAL memories as evident in the crowd's laughter and enjoyment. The emcee of the evening was Assoc Prof Low Ee Ling, whose witty remarks definitely helped in making the dinner an affair to remember.

codified written form (Written Tamil) and is used and accepted by all Tamils in Tamil Nadu, Sri Lanka, Malaysia and Singapore. For this work (Seetha Lakshmi and Saravanan Vanithamani, CRPP 06/04SL, 2005), the Matched Guise methodology developed by (Bourhis, Giles, Tajfel, 1973) is being used. Through this study it is hoped to establish the use of the Standard Spoken Tamil as an additional resource in the Teaching and Learning of Tamil Language. Currently the students from Tamil speaking families have been observed using Standard Spoken Tamil to a significant extent. Some of the Tamil teachers have been observed using SST and Written Tamil as a mix (CRPP Panel 3's study, Shegar & Ridzuan, 2005). Some teachers continue to prefer to use the Written Tamil for spoken Tamil as they were exposed to it mostly during their own school and training days.

The consultants for the main study are Dr. Harold Schiffman and Dr. Annamalai, Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology, Leipzig, Germany. Dr. Annamalai had recommended a pilot test on Tamil speakers in Chennai, Tamil Nadu, the native state for Tamil Language. A Matched Guise test was constructed by the Principal Investigators of the CRPP Project on Standard Spoken Tamil (Saravanan Vanithamani & Seetha Lakshmi, 2004). The pilot test was conducted in July 2004 in Chennai. Through the test the data was collected from Tamil trainee teachers at a teacher's training college, and postgraduate students from Madras University, Meenakshi College and from media journalists. They are all first language and native speakers. The data was analysed and reported at the World Tamil Teachers' Conference in Chennai in 2004 (Seetha Lakshmi & Saravanan Vanithamani, 2004). The second phase of the study included NIE trainee teachers and MOE Tamil teachers. A pilot study was concluded in February 2005.

Preliminary Findings:

1st Variety SST:

Those who spoke in Standard Spoken Tamil were rated as people who are highly educated, who are well accepted in society, are well liked, are respected and are expected to hold high positions in their jobs.

2nd variety Written Tamil

Those who speak Written Tamil are considered to be highly respected people. The respondents provided further feedback on the use of SST and

uncomfortable using Written Tamil to communicate in spoken contexts. This has resulted in the young Tamil speakers switching to English. It is time for a rethink on the exclusive use of Written Tamil for communicative uses. The community needs to develop pedagogical approaches to teach students coming from English-speaking families.

An MOE survey in 2004 established that nearly 57% of Primary One students were from English-speaking families. It is argued that we have lost one generation of Tamil speakers that has switched to English. Earlier studies on language from English to Tamil have been observed in Saravanan (1989; 1998; 1999; 2000; 2001). Students from English-speaking homes facing difficulties when using written Tamil to converse with fellow classmates. At the same time they need an additional variety to communicate with their peers with ease. Here, the Standard Spoken Tamil will provide the platform for them to converse in Tamil instead of English. It is time to develop Standard Spoken Tamil as an additional resource for pedagogical use. The study hopes to bridge the gap from Tamil children shifting away to English and to bring them back to speaking in Tamil through an additional standard variety which has been identified as SST. This will add to the repertoire of language codes available to Singapore Tamil-speaking children, Tamil speaking community and the Tamil media domain. The outcomes of the SST study are deemed to be the following:

- This will support the potential use of SST as an additional resource for the acquisition of Tamil in Singapore Schools.
- The study will help redress the disjunction in the pedagogic content where only one monolithic norm prevails, that of Written Tamil.
- The acquisition in SST has the potential of expanding the linguistic resource of Tamil students. SST is to be considered and promoted as a variety that bridges language use across school and community.

Extensive research has been conducted by Seetha Lakshmi (2001) on the place and contribution of the mass media in the development of Tamil language in Singapore. It was noted that newspaper 'Tamil Murasu' has contributed the most to the development of Tamil language and literature. The study concluded that the media should contribute further to make Tamil language a contemporary and a societal language code.

Extensive studies on Standard Spoken Tamil conducted over the last 2 decades indicate SST as the language of "explanation". Tamil has a strict

The guests for the evening included what Assoc Prof Low calls the 'gods and goddesses of linguistics in Singapore'. Some of those present were: Assoc Prof Lubna Alsagoff, Prof Allan Luke and Dr Carmen Luke, and Prof Courtney Cazden from the National Institute of Education; Prof Koh Tai Ann and Assoc Prof Lai Phooi Ching from Nanyang Technological University; Assoc Prof Robbie Goh, and his wife, Mervlyn Lee, and Dr Wong Lian Aik from the National University of Singapore; Dr Willy Renandya from the Regional Language Centre; Mrs Soo Kim Bee from SRL; Prof Tham Seong Chee from UNAS; SAAL advisers Assoc Prof Anne Pakir and Dr Teng Su Ching; SAAL Patron Dr Ho Wah Kam, and his wife, Mrs Ho; and SAAL members and friends from Singapore and abroad.

REPORT ON THE 1ST SAAL SPECIAL INTEREST GROUP (SIG)

Child Language Research in Singapore: The State of the Art & Where do we go from here?

Tan Liming Keith and Sheeladevi Ramachandran
Department of English Language and Literature
National University of Singapore

Organised by the Singapore Association for Applied Linguistics (SAAL)

Date: 3 September 2005 (Saturday)

Time: 9.00am-12.00pm

*Venue: NUS, Department of English Language and Literature, 05-09,
Reading Room*

Opening of the 1st SAAL Child Language SIG:

1. 'Child Language in Singapore: The State of the Art & Where do we go from here?' by Dr. Madalena Cruz-Ferreira, Department of English Language and Literature, NUS

The first SAAL Child Language Special Interest Group (SIG) was opened by its main convenor, Dr. Madalena Cruz-Ferreira. Dr. Cruz-Ferreira's talk provided an overview of the state of child language research in Singapore and laid out the SIG's immediate and long-term goals. The SIG was made up of three other panel speakers and an audience consisting of students, teachers

and researchers.

Research on child language in Singapore is still in its infancy. However, interest in the area has been growing steadily, given greater awareness of the potential knowledge to be gained from Singapore's unique linguistic landscape. Not only are new areas of research being explored, there has also been an increasing number of young researchers interested in the area. As a recent *Bibliography of Child Language Research in Singapore* (Cruz-Ferreira, 2005) shows, an impressive proportion of research has been done by students. Yet, despite the local research community's interests spanning a broad range of areas, there is a lack of mutual knowledge of the work being done by different researchers. It is this problem that the formation of the SIG is aimed at addressing, chiefly through the creation of a network, and the facilitation of activities and exchange of ideas.

In the long term, the SIG aims to create a greater awareness of child language research done in Singapore by extending its network internationally, especially within Southeast Asia, Australia, and New Zealand. Researchers in Singapore can contribute to this cause by sharing their research online in the CHILDES database (<http://childes.psy.cmu.edu/>), which will enable anyone with an internet connection access to their data.

Members of the SIG can also look forward to some exciting developments in the near future. The International Association of Applied Linguistics (AILA) has expressed interest in child language research in Singapore, and has invited the SIG to give a talk at the 15th World Congress of Applied Linguistics to be held in Essen, Germany, in 2008. Also forthcoming is the launch of a Masters of Arts degree in Speech Language Pathology by NUS, a collaboration between the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences and the Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine.

Presentations by Panel Speakers

2. 'Conceptual and Semantic Development: A Cross-linguistic Perspective' by Dr. Ng Bee Chin, Language and Communication Centre, School of Humanities and Social Sciences, NTU

Dr. Ng spoke on the relationship between conceptual and semantic development. Generally, there is a mismatch between the two processes, in that the relationship between conceptual development and semantic development need not be a one-to-one mapping. A similar mismatch holds

vanakkam, *vaanga* *vaanga* (Standard Spoken Tamil)

Greetings, welcome welcome

vankkam, *vaa* *vaa* (Colloquial Tamil)

Greetings, Come Come

Source: voice excerpt from a Singapore Tamil classroom.

Here, the Written Tamil is used to express greetings in a formal way. On the other hand, the same phrase in Colloquial Tamil, *vaa* is considered a disrespectful term and a person who uses this phrase will be identified as an uneducated and uncultivated person.

Young Tamil speakers are tuning to a changing world of media and Internet, and are seen to enjoy many varieties of Tamil including Standard Spoken Tamil used in Tamil cinema, movies and song lyrics. Currently a study on the established variety of SST both in the classroom and outside the classroom is being conducted by the National Institute of Education - Centre for Research in Pedagogy and Practice (CRPP). The study conducted by CRPP (CRP 06/04SL) on Standard Spoken Tamil is the use of SST in the classroom. The study on extensive use of SST in Tamil language classrooms is one of the funded research studies at the CRPP. The study aims to establish the use of Standard Spoken Tamil (SST) as an additional resource for the teaching and learning of Tamil for school achievement and use amongst Tamil speaking students. It also aims to help the teachers to develop and use SST as an additional resource in their Tamil classrooms. In this study, the issues in the use of SST in classroom pedagogy will be discussed and analyzed.

In Singapore, till the mid 1990's Written Tamil has been the norm for teaching spoken Tamil in Tamil classrooms. As the educational language of Tamil is taught on the basis of Written Tamil, this variety of Written Tamil has been enforced in the society for use in a range of communication contexts including the home domain. As the Tamil-speaking community outside the school uses Standard Spoken Tamil, the students feel

Translation: It is very happy to participate in this programme.

“... *indho nigachila kalndhukkeeradhu manskku*

... This programme mix to heart

rombo shokka keedhu” (Colloquial Tamil).

very happy is

Here the speaker uses the word *shokka* (*shiok* - from English) which means 'happy' in colloquial Tamil.

“... *indha nighzchiyil kalandhu kollvadhu manadhukku*

... This programme mix to heart

migavum magizhchiyaaga irukkiradhu” (written Tamil)

very happy is

Source: Vasantham Central, Tamil TV News, 9.8.2005 8.30pm.

This shows the need for an awareness of the use of Standard Spoken Tamil. In order to facilitate communication and maintain communication in Tamil, we need Standard Spoken Tamil and not Written Tamil. Standard Spoken Tamil is easily understood and it is a norm-driven variety used in the mass media and within the Tamil speaking community.

Example: 6

vanakkam, vaarungall vaarungall (Written Tamil)

Greetings, welcome welcome

for how children learn words: early words do not show a direct object-word correlation. Also, semantic development stretches over a longer period of time than conceptual development, and is more difficult to track.

Dr. Ng's study focused on the acquisition of Hokkien numeral classifiers. Her study was conducted on 157 native speakers of Hokkien from Singapore consisting of children from 5 to 12 years old and adults. In Singapore, since children are taught the use of classifiers in school, she chose to work with children who have no formal instruction in this language.

Dr. Ng's results showed that there were cross-linguistic differences in the acquisition of classifiers and that semantic loading within each category is crucial in predicting acquisition. She quoted parallel findings in research done by Susan Carey (1985). While Carey's study revealed that certain shapes were primal among a number of classifiers, the data collected by the speaker showed otherwise. Dr. Ng concluded by highlighting the issue of norming, both the need to ascertain what the norms are when conducting child research and whether these norms represent adult norms.

3. 'Language Convergence and Bilingual Acquisition: The Case of Conditional Constructions' by Dr. Chen Ee San, Division of Chinese, NTU

Dr. Chen's study focused on the simultaneous acquisition of conditionals (e.g., if..., then...) in Singapore Colloquial English (SCE) and Singapore Colloquial Mandarin (SCM) by local pre-school children speaking both languages.

According to Nichols' (1986) framework categorising conditionals, English conditional constructions are prototypically dependent-marked (DM), while Chinese conditional constructions are prototypically head-marked (HM). However, in SCE and SCM, conditional structures exist which are not found in other varieties of English and Mandarin. Specifically, conditional constructions in SCE have been found to contain head-marking patterns typical in Chinese, while SCM has been found to display dependent-marking patterns similar to those in English. Dr. Chen attributed this convergence to contact between the two colloquial varieties, which has given rise to a more stable and creole-like variety.

Considering the implications of these observations on child SCE and SCM, two questions are raised: (1) whether the convergence between conditional

constructions in both languages at the societal level is reflected in bilingual child language, and (2) to what extent this convergence is observed in an individual child, i.e., whether the grammars of the two languages are distinct.

To answer these questions, two elicited imitation (EI) experiments were carried out on 24 bilingual pre-school children. The first experiment found that convergence in the conditional structures of SCE and SCM at the societal level was reflected in the linguistic repertoire of those children. However, the convergence was asymmetrical, in that Chinese influence was more prominently observed in SCE than English influence in SCM. The results of the second experiment suggest that SCE and SCM are represented as separate (but interacting) systems in the children. Within an individual subject, marking preferences for a particular language tended to be consistent, with marking preferences for each language differing from those of the other.

4. 'Project Flow: Negotiation of Meaning, Peer Work, and Language Learning Opportunities for Bilingual Children' by Dr. Rita Elaine Silver, Department of English Language and Literature, NIE.

Dr. Silver's first study looked at immigrant children from China learning English in Singapore, in order to investigate their interactional patterns. These children live in a multilingual/multicultural environment, with bilingual education and exposure to at least two varieties of English. The study, which was conducted with 26 informants aged 6 to 9, targeted pedagogical tasks involving communicative exchanges with adult native speakers. While the experimental group received feedback in response to their problems in the tasks, the control group was not given such feedback. Results showed that more learners in the experimental group improved than in the control group.

Her second study investigated peer-interactions and English language learning by Singaporean bilingual children at lower primary levels. Results showed that code-switching was prevalent and that it took place in situations deemed appropriate by the students. The study also revealed that teachers felt that peer-to-peer interactions were not helpful, as they inhibited rather than enhanced learning opportunities. Teachers reported that the classrooms were noisy and that the children often did not learn because they tended to switch to Singlish or to use their mother tongue.

The third and ongoing study, conducted by Dr. Silver and colleagues,

. . . This programme everybody

nalla vaaippaa irukku'

(a participant's comment) (Standard Spoken Tamil)

good opportunity is

“. . . *indha nigazhchi ellorukkum*

. . . This programme everybody

nalla vaaippaaga irukkiradhu' (Written Tamil)

good opportunity is

Translation: This programme is a good opportunity for all.
(Vasantham Central, 9.8.2005 8.30pm, Tamil TV News)

Example: 5

“. . . *indha nigarrchiyil kalandhukkiradhu manasukku*

. . . This programme mix to heart

migavum magizhchiyaa irukku' (a participant's comment in Standard Spoken Tamil)

very happy is

The following example illustrates a voice excerpt from a Tamil classroom.

Example : 3

amma kadaikku pogireergala? (Written Tamil)

Mother shop going?

amma kadaikku poreengala? (Standard Spoken Tamil)

Mother shop going?

Mother, are you going to the shop? (Translation)

In Singapore, Tamil students who study Tamil language as their Mother Tongue language at second language level tend to use Written Tamil for all functions including introducing themselves and in story telling activities. It is not parents but teachers who insist on this practice of communicating in Written Tamil. Students express themselves in Written Tamil in and outside the classroom as if they were taking part in oratorical competitions. There is no vitality in their language use when they do this. So, it is urgent that a review in the use of Written Tamil in classrooms is conducted and to encourage a shift to Standard Spoken Tamil as an additional resource for communicative purposes.

Other examples where the use of Written Tamil is the norm would be the annual Prime Minister's Message on National Day, Children's Storytelling Contest, National Day Parade (Radio & TV). The interviews during the National Day Parade and the Prime Minister's Swearing in Ceremony also tend to be in Written Tamil with very little Standard Spoken Tamil. The communicative use of Standard Spoken Tamil is that it is easily understood by other participants. If they use Written Tamil, it tends to sound as if they are reciting it from memory instead of talking with understanding. Given below are excerpts taken from interviews with the public at the National Day Parade which was telecast on August 9th, 2004 (a participant's comment):

Example: 4

“... *indha nigazhchi ellaarukkum*

investigates the kind of interactions and learning opportunities that take place in Singaporean classroom peer-to-peer activities. It also looks at interventions that might be helpful in the incorporation of more peer work, or in making peer work more effective for language learning. Peer work in Singapore classrooms was found to be predominantly goal-oriented rather than process-oriented. Findings from the data collected so far suggest that intervention seems to be working. The study's completion is predicted for June 2006.

Discussion Session involving panel speakers and participants

One dominant theme arising from the panel presentations was the lack of a clear set of analytical tools for the norming of the different stages in child language acquisition in Singapore. Dr. Cruz-Ferreira raised the need for the innovation of such frameworks, as it is often unclear in the literature what the targets set for a child's acquisition of language are based on. The panel and participants discussed whether child language should legitimately be compared with adult targets, or targets from children at other developmental stages, or data from other languages. The question of objectivity in the measurement of a child's linguistic competence is compounded by the historical and current contact between different languages in Singapore – should researchers assess language acquisition of the children here against, for instance, British or mainland Chinese norms? In addition, with most Singaporean children being at least bilingual, problems arise from comparing their language competencies with those of monolingual children from other countries.

Dr. Silver pointed out an apparent mismatch between political and personal views of language as a resource. While language is officially viewed chiefly as an economic and cultural tool in Singapore, at the individual level, things are much more complicated, as people (not least children) make choices as to the language(s) to employ in different situations. For example, it was noted that children in an English language class discussed things related to the lesson in English, but switched to Mandarin when they joked with or insulted their classmates. Yet, from the point of view of education policy, children are expected to be equally proficient in two languages.

In a related discussion, Dr. Ng questioned how much of researchers' understanding of children's cognitive and linguistic development is translated into language policy in Singapore. Also discussed was the question

whether language policies here are formulated with advice from child language researchers, given the context of recent reforms made to pre-school educational policy.

The SIG meeting was closed with Dr. Cruz-Ferreira's wish that future child language research and language education in the local context be informed by the issues raised in this meeting.

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Discussion on Mother Tongue Issues in Multilingual Communities: Tamil Language Varieties-Standard Spoken Tamil (SST) *

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Abstract

This paper examines Tamil Language and its usage among the Tamil diaspora. It also examines the role of Tamil Language in Singapore especially in the teaching and learning of Tamil Language. It discusses briefly the objectives of the NIE - CRPP (SST) study on Standard Spoken Tamil, its importance in classroom teaching and its place and functions in pedagogical settings such as Tamil classrooms and its function as a communicative resource language in students' lives to enable them to communicate to other Tamil speaking communities in Singapore and in the rest of the world.

1.1 Varieties of Tamil

Colloquial Tamil is not accepted among Tamil educated speakers and scholars. But, the term '*mugam*' used in Standard Spoken Tamil to refer to the term *face* is acceptable in the teaching and learning context.

During the 1960's and 1970's, media programmes on the radio and television did not accept Standard Spoken Tamil in their programmes (Seetha Lakshmi, 2001). In these programmes, it did not matter whether you spoke to a child, a teenager, an ordinary worker or a well educated professional; it was always in Written Tamil. Written Tamil was the required norm even in informal situations and phone-in interview programmes. The media management acted as a gate-keeper in maintaining Written Tamil in all its programmes. But from 1995, the rules allowed for some accommodation as more talk shows and call-in programmes were broadcast, to help increase the number of listeners during such programmes, and these included telephone interviews, youth programmes and children's programmes. When the listeners used Colloquial Tamil, the announcers paraphrased their sentences into acceptable Standard Spoken Tamil. At times they tended to paraphrase what was spoken into Written Tamil. It is obvious that the deejays would rarely be permitted to use Colloquial Tamil in any media programmes. Currently attracting younger listeners and attempting to raise the number of listeners has forced them to accommodate to some listeners' use of Colloquial Tamil. In TV programmes such as variety shows and in SMS messages it is natural to use Spoken Tamil. In spite of these shifts in the use of the language to SST, Colloquial Tamil and SMS, the Tamil media authority has continued to maintain a policy of endorsing the High variety of Tamil as the approved language norm in the domain of the media.

In the home domain, some Singaporean Tamil parents who speak English to their children encourage their children to speak in Written Tamil as this is expected in the school domain. The parents themselves probably speak a spoken variety of Standard Tamil at home. It is mainly because these parents believe that Written Tamil will help their children in their written examinations where the answers are expected to be in Written Tamil. They have given more importance to doing well in high-stakes examinations where Written Tamil and writing skills play a vital role in obtaining high grades and in turn decides admission to top schools. They do not recognize the functions of communicating in Standard Spoken Tamil as they themselves communicate in English in their family and friendship domains.

1.2. In Singapore, writers of Tamil textbooks and storybooks tend not to use Standard Spoken Tamil in informal situations such as dialogues and conversations. In classrooms, students and teachers try to establish a common standardization in spoken Tamil but in reality tend to mix both the spoken and written Tamil varieties. This was reported by Schiffman (1998) from his observations in some Singapore schools. Some of the listening and speaking related teaching aids produced by the Curriculum Planning & Development Division (CPDD) contain examples of Written Tamil and they include very little teaching speaking skills, social drama and conversations. Standard Spoken Tamil is used in these drama/role-play texts that include dialogues. On the other hand, since 1995, Standard Spoken Tamil has been approved by media authorities, though sometimes even a low variety of Colloquial Tamil is used in racy talk shows.

Example: 2

The following is from Mr. Ilamaaran, a compere on 'Music Manthra' talk show from Vasantham Central (2004):

un mugathai paar; un mugathile kaiyai vaikka
(Standard Spoken Tamil)

Your face see; your face hand keep

un moonjiyai paar; un moonjile kaiyai vekka
(Coloquial Tamil).

Your face see; your face hand keep

'Look at your face and place my hand on your face'

(Source: Music Manthra, Vasantham Central, 2004)

In Coloquial Tamil, the term used for *face* is '*moonji*'. In SST, it is '*mugam*'.

Tamil language has a history of 3000 years. In India, Tamil is one of the 18 official languages. Tamil is reported to be the first Indian language to appear on the Internet. Nearly 70 million Tamilians are spread across fifty countries around the world. The University of Pennsylvania and Berkley University have a South Asian Studies department each, where Tamil language is one of the languages taught.

Tamil has been endorsed as a classical language and this was announced in the Indian Parliament in 2004. George L. Hart, a scholar of Tamil language at Berkeley University, states that to qualify as a classical language, a language must satisfy several criteria. It should be ancient, have the value of antiquity, should have no influence from other traditions and have a long literary tradition (Hart, 2004). Tamil scholars, writers and politicians have been continuously trying to get a classical language status for Tamil endorsed by the Central Government of India. With this newfound status in 2004, Tamil can now be taught at all the Universities in India and modern languages departments at foreign universities might consider giving it a chair of its own in their Universities. It has created a heightened awareness of the potential for a renaissance movement to increase the status of Tamil in Tamil Nadu's society.

The Tamil diaspora is spread across Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Singapore, and more recently in the United States of America. In Mauritius, South Africa, Fiji, Trinidad & Tobago, New Caledonia & Tahiti, Tamils have lost touch with the language in their day to day life, but keep their identity by giving themselves Tamil names. In Mauritius and South Africa, the community has Tamil organisations and works with the Government to take developmental measures to help the people know their language and culture and to speak the language. In these countries, the Tamils preserve their language and culture by speaking the language largely in their home and religious domains. To establish the status of Tamil in 1997 and 2003 they have organised the World Tamil & Tamil Teachers' Conferences in Mauritius and South Africa, after which there is now a renewal and the Tamils take great pride in teaching the language and on passing the culture to the younger generation.

In Tamil Nadu both educated professionals and people in the villages speak several varieties of dialects based on their native places of origin (eg., Trinelveli Tamil, Madurai Tamil, Tanjore Tamil, Coimbatore Tamil, Salem Tamil, etc. (Arasu, 2004). The language is spoken in the villages without much code mixing when compared to cities like Chennai (Madras), where it

is code-mixed with English and code-mixed with other south Indian languages by Malayalam, Kannada and Telugu speakers. In education, politics, law, medicine and business Tamil is the dominant language next to English in India. In mass media especially in cinema, the lyrics are code mixed with English and this variety appeals to the younger generation of the Tamil speaking community in India, Singapore and Malaysia. Tamilians in Singapore and Malaysia who have shifted to English for their day-to-day interaction.

Several issues have been raised with regards to the use and functions of Spoken Tamil and Written Tamil. Tamil is a diglossia, that is, a language which has distinctive varieties, Written Tamil and Spoken Tamil. Tamil educators prefer to use the term Written Tamil for greater distinctions between these varieties. Linguist Harold Schiffman, a scholar of Tamil language at University of Pennsylvania, has used the term Written Tamil. In Tamil, Written Tamil is also interpreted as language used in literature. The language used in literature has not been the same over the ages. In contemporary poetic literature, several varieties and registers are used and are read by Tamil-educated speakers. The language used in ancient Tamil literature though is difficult to understand for someone who does not have much background and experience in Tamil language without the help of literary guides and Tamil dictionaries. The term, Written Tamil, is used to denote the variety used in the Written Tamil form today. The Written Tamil is the norm set in the syllabus and in the curriculum guidelines by academics and educators. It is used in classroom settings, formal situations for speaking in the media, writing formal letters, and newspaper articles, etc. Standard Spoken Tamil is used informally in day-to-day conversations and in some media talk shows.

Tamil writers and educationists felt that Tamil is not 'standardised' because there is no systematic description or guide books on the grammar of Standard Spoken Tamil. But Schiffman (1999) has published 'A Reference Grammar of Spoken Tamil', a systematic description of the Tamil that is standardized in the society of Tamil speakers by informal consensus. It is accepted by the people of the Tamil community. Schiffman, who has done vast research in Tamil language and the varieties of Spoken Tamil and Standard Spoken Tamil, argues that Spoken Tamil has also standardised itself in Singapore and it can be identified as SST in many domains including the domains of the mass media (Schiffman, 1998). If we were to listen to Tamil speakers' speaking Tamil twenty years ago, we would be able to identify them as being speakers of the varieties of Ceylonese Tamil, Tanjore Tamil, Pondicherry

Tamil, Chennai Tamil, Madurai Tamil, Trinaveli Tamil, Salem Tamil, Andhra Tamil, Kerala Tamil (Arasu, 2004). If four Tamils each from any of these groups were to come together and converse now, it would be difficult to identify their native places; instead a common variety of spoken Tamil is discernible. This is the variety that is being identified as Standard Spoken Tamil by Sciffman (2003), Arasu (2004) and Renganathan (2004).

The varieties of both spoken, colloquial and Written Tamil are illustrated below:

Example: 1

<i>Innaama, saukkimaa</i>	<i>kiiriyaa?</i>	(Colloquial Tamil)
What dear, fine,	good health (in)?	(reflects 3rd person with same status)
<i>Ennaamma, savukkiyamaa</i>	<i>irukkiiingala?</i>	(considered as Standard Spoken Tamil)
What dear, fine,	good health (in)?	(reflects 3rd person singular with same status and respect)
<i>Ennammaa, sugammaaga</i>	<i>Irukkirigala?</i>	(Written Tamil)
My dear,	how are you? Are you in good health? (Translation)	

The comparison between Written Tamil and Standard Spoken Tamil is in the use of grammatical inflections that reflect 3rd person singular with respect. In this example, when the speaker uses SST, he is seen to show respect to the listener. If the speaker uses Written Tamil, the listener will sometimes have difficulty in understanding the High variety. If the speaker uses colloquial Tamil, an educated listener will be offended. Colloquial Tamil is not accepted in the educational domain as it is considered a Low variety.