

Dilemmas in planning English/vernacular relations in post-colonial communities

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In the context of globalization and post-modern discourses, the debate about the relative status of local and dominant languages poses serious policy problems for post-colonial communities. Critics of minority language rights (MLR) generally point out that engineering a language shift on behalf of a vernacular language – motivated by the preservationist interests, collective rights and sentimental associations of an ethnic group – is futile, as the economic and social mobilities of individuals are bound to work against this enterprise. Proponents of MLR have gone to the other extreme of essentializing the linguistic identity of minority communities, generalizing their language attitudes, and treating local language rights as non-negotiable. This article addresses this debate in the context of the attempts to promote Tamil by the military leadership in the North and East of Sri Lanka. The paper brings together data gathered in sociolinguistic studies for four years in the Jaffna society in order to understand the reception of the language policy in everyday life. The leadership recognizes that language policy is a symbolic statement for political purposes and tolerates certain inconsistencies in policy and practice. While the community assures itself of ethnic pride and linguistic autonomy with the stated policies, it negotiates divergent interests in the gaps between the policy/practice divide. Scholars should recognize the agency of subaltern communities to negotiate language politics in creative and critical ways that transcend the limited constructs formulated to either cynically sweep aside or unduly romanticize language rights.

KEYWORDS: Minority language rights, Tamil nationalism, post-colonial communities, code choice, Sri Lanka

INTRODUCTION

Recent collections of studies on language planning in post-colonial communities articulate the debilitating conflicts in planning the relative status of the vernacular or mother tongue¹ and English in society and education (see Canagarajah 2005; Lin and Martin 2005; Street 2001). In communities where the vernacular has been given primacy in educational and social life as a form of affirmative action against the disparities suffered during colonization, there

are subtle resistances from local people in favor of English (as in Malaysia (David and Govindasamy 2005) and Iran (Riazi 2005)). In communities where policy makers have encouraged the role of English in deference to the economic and educational opportunities of globalization, there is a near-chauvinistic resurgence of localism (as in Brazil (Rajagopalan 2005) and India (Ramanathan 2004)). Many scholars bring out the unresolved tensions this dilemma creates for these communities in policy and practice. We see the embarrassing deviations from the avowed policy of using English Only in classrooms in Eritrea (Wright 2001), India (Annamalai 2005), South Africa (Probyn 2005), Tanzania (Brock-Utne 2005), Kenya (Bunyi 2005), Brunei (Martin 2005), and Hong Kong (Luk 2005), to mention just a few, as the local language is introduced by teachers and students in many subtle ways to negotiate their desired values, identities, and interests.

To adopt a broad-lens perspective, these dilemmas reflect to some extent the effects of the tensions between two major historical movements on many communities in the post-colonial world today: decolonization and globalization. While non-Western communities are busy working on one project (decolonization), the carpet has been pulled from under their feet by another (globalization). It is as if one historical process was subsumed by another before the process was complete. Or it appears as if one movement was subverted by the other. There are significant differences in the project of both movements. Decolonization typically entails resisting English and other colonial languages in favor of building an autonomous nation-state; globalization has made the borders of the nation-state porous and reinserted the importance of English language for all communities, through multinational production and marketing relationships, pop culture, cyber space, and digital technology. Apart from the pressures the nation-state is facing from outside, it is also facing pressures from within (see May 2001). The claims of diverse social groups and ethnic communities within the nation-state have become more assertive. Post-modern conditions have also created certain significant changes in discourse, calling for a different orientation to language and political rights. People are not prepared to think of their identities in essentialist terms (as belonging exclusively to one language or culture), their languages and cultures as pure (separated from everything foreign), and their communities as homogeneous (closed for contact with others). As these constructs are losing their status as bounded and objective entities, and we recognize their constructed, fluid, and hybrid nature, scholars are beginning to doubt that sound policies can be based on such nebulous constructs (see Brutt-Griffler 2002).

In the context of these changing geopolitical and philosophical contexts, we can understand how the debate about the relative status of the vernacular and dominant languages can pose serious practical and policy problems in many nation-states. In post-colonial contexts, the debate translates itself specifically as 'mother tongue versus English' – as it does in Sri Lanka. Underlying this debate are related dilemmas about the varying place of collective versus

individual rights, preservation versus mobility goals, ethnicity versus class interests, and sentimental versus pragmatic motivations. Proponents and critics of schools like language ecology, linguistic human rights, and linguistic imperialism have been using these constructs to bolster their own position about minority language rights (MLR) – as a recent debate in the pages of the *Journal of Language, Identity, and Education*² shows (see also May this issue). Critics generally point out that engineering a language shift on behalf of the vernacular – motivated by the preservationist interests, collective rights and sentimental associations of an ethnic group – is futile, as the needs of economic and social mobility of individuals are bound to work against this enterprise (see Brutt-Griffler 2002; Edwards 1985). Proponents of MLR have gone to the other extreme of somewhat essentializing the linguistic identity of minority communities, generalizing their language attitudes, and treating vernacular rights as non-negotiable (Phillipson 1992; Skutnabb-Kangas 2002). An abstract theoretical debate will only lead to overstating the positions, simplifying reality, and destroying the utility of important LPP constructs in favor of one ideological position or the other. Therefore, it is important to ground these thorny philosophical and political questions in specific communities, in their complex historical and geopolitical contexts (see also Blommaert this issue; Patrick this issue).

THIS STUDY

I want to explore the English/vernacular debate and the theoretical dilemmas posed for MLR in the context of the efforts by the Sri Lankan Tamil community to empower their *mother tongue* (see Note 1 for usage of this term). Language is at the root of the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka, the South Asian island that has come close to being torn asunder in almost two decades of ferocious fighting between majority Sinhalese and minority Tamils, costing at least 50,000 lives by conservative estimates. This paper focuses on the linguistic policies and practices in Jaffna – the northern peninsula of Sri Lanka which has historically been the cultural, religious and political center of the Tamils. It constitutes the Jaffna Tamil speech community which speaks a distinct Tamil dialect. Since 1990 the nationalist militant organization LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) has set up a *de facto* regime in much of the area in the North and East (claimed as the Tamil homeland) which it has ‘liberated’ from the Sinhala Buddhist government and provisionally named Tamil Eelam.³ In the light of the hectic linguistic activity taking place in this emergent state – both ‘purifying’ Tamil and raising its status – this paper specifically addresses the relative status of English and Tamil in language planning and policy (LPP).

The paper brings together data gathered in a series of sociolinguistic studies carried out for four years (between 1990 and 1994) in the Jaffna society in order to understand bilingualism in the local context. Transcriptions of

conversations in representative sites in the community – such as urban markets and village huts, secondary schools and the university – enabled me to interpret the strategies of code choice in the community. Sociolinguistic data are complemented by ethnographic observations on the attitudes and practices of negotiating English and Tamil in the community. Apart from being native to the Jaffna Tamil community, I enjoyed a vantage-point for research as a lecturer in English language and literature in the Jaffna University when I lived and worked in this region. The complete methodology and data are found in other publications where I have reported on the findings of relevance for code-switching and language acquisition (see Canagarajah 1995a, 1995b, 1999). My intention in this article is to revisit the data for its implications for language policy debates.⁴

Before discussing the language plans and practices in Jaffna, it is important to situate the linguistic life of the community in historical context (see also May this issue; Ricento this issue). The next section therefore provides an overview of language planning activities in this island, beginning from the colonial British administration. The strategies undertaken by the British to enforce the status and acquisition of English introduced a range of language attitudes, ideologies, and stratification modes which still have a bearing on the sociolinguistic challenges for this community.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

*Planning English ascendance*⁵

The history of language planning activities in Sri Lanka helps us realize to what extent force (i.e. military power) has been implicated in establishing and sustaining policy decisions. When the British conquered the whole island in 1815 and yoked the previously three kingdoms into one nation-state, they had the power to raise the status of their language over the other two major languages of the island. Although initially they followed the previous Dutch colonial policy of providing some amount of regional autonomy for the native ethnic communities, economic realities dictated a revision of this policy. The Colebrook-Cameron commission that was appointed to recommend economic reforms in 1832 went on to make proposals on language status planning and even acquisition planning, suggesting the extent to which these matters were interrelated. The commission recommended that administration should be centralized, with English as the working official language (see Wickramasuriya 1976). This was supposed to help integrate the island's colonial administration with the rest of the empire. To help bridge the gulf between the colonizers and the colonized, the commission recommended that a group of native administrators should be trained for the lower level posts of interpreters, court clerks and regional headmen. It was to develop English

proficiency for these functionaries that an English education system was set up in the secondary and tertiary levels. Thus the groundwork was laid for a new class of bilingual professionals in the island.

If status planning posits an evaluation of the language, and acquisition planning its distribution (Cooper 1989: 184), the colonial administrators knew that these were complementary. If the status of English was to be enviable, its supply had to be limited. Therefore, although English education quickly became a 'craze' in the island as it was the key to social status and economic affluence (Wickramasuriya 1976), not all could gain access to it. Unlike vernacular education, which was free, English education was fee levying. Thus English proficiency came to be distributed according to the already prevailing caste hierarchy. Furthermore, due to the limitations of resources and native English teachers, the few English schools were concentrated in the towns, leaving the rural folk vernacular-educated and monolingual. It was also the case that Christians were given preference for these advantages; others who went through English education inevitably ended up as Christians. Thus English began to function as the new criterion for stratifying the society, providing status, wealth and power to the rich, upper caste, urban Christians. At the best of times, natives proficient in English were a meager 6.6 percent of the total population (de Souza 1969). The society was stratified in the typical pyramid structure – a stratification that is still formidable. With the largely L2 dominant English-educated bilingual natives at the top and the Tamil monolinguals at the bottom (with their respective culture and lifestyle) the Jaffna Tamil society consisted of two distinct classes. English, the powerful code, was the language of administration, education, law, commerce and polite social discourse for the English-educated; Tamil served all purposes of rural monolinguals, while being the sole language of Saivite religion, traditional education, cuisine, domestic life, and kinship.

To implant the language deeply in this society, colonial administrators also had to cultivate the values and discourses that undergird the language. The prestige of English and the permanency of its status in the eyes of the natives depends on the natives learning to interpret the world through this new language. English education helped this function also. 'English education' meant not only teaching English language, but also adopting the medium, modes of instruction, curriculum, and teaching materials of the British public schools for general education. Students, expected to be boarded for the duration of the course in order to be weaned away from the cultural and linguistic influences of the home, were coached to use English with native fluency and accuracy (see Chelliah 1922). Initially, while the English schools cultivated adolescent bilinguality,⁶ at the beginning of the 20th century there were many childhood bilinguals in English-speaking families. Most of these families were culturally alienated, displaying an L2 acculturated bilinguality. Some of them were deculturated, 'feeling at home neither in the East nor West' (see Wickramasuriya 1976: 20). This group dominated economic and social status

in later periods and turned out to represent an urbane, cosmopolitan, liberal culture in the community.

Planning Sinhala ascendance

Though Sri Lanka was granted independence in 1948, the English-educated local elite who took over power were not interested in changing the status of the language from which they themselves profited. It was in 1956 that a Marxist-oriented populist government (still led by the anglicized elite) attempted to dislodge the status of English in the name of deprived Sinhala monolingual folk. What started as a reaction against English soon spilt over to engulf Tamil. When the controversial 'Sinhala Only Act' was passed in 1956, Tamil was denied official language status. The Sinhalese justified this by saying that the 'divide and rule' policy of the British had benefited minority Tamils with a sound English education and economic advantages which had to now be redressed. Although this Act was passed 'democratically' in the Sinhalese-dominated parliament, the suppression of Tamil protest by police and armed forces demonstrated once again to Tamils that language status is built on force.

Even though Sinhala became the official language of administration, and both vernaculars took over primary and secondary education (with English taught as a second language), it was difficult to dislodge English from many other domains. English remained the language of higher education, commerce, communication, technology and travel. In this sense, English was still a working official language⁷ in many institutional domains. Added to this was the power English derived from being an international language, which still assured it a prestigious position in the Sri Lankan society. It has even been pointed out that the Sinhala government's gesture of nationalism was merely symbolic in order to gain votes from the monolingual folk. However, Sinhala was the statutory and symbolic official language. It was also gradually replacing English as the working language (in many administrative domains). Although Tamils never stopped contesting Sinhala as the statutory official language of the whole island, they had to be content with having Tamil as a working official language for education and administration at the regional level.

The post-independence nationalistic language planning activities did not create radical changes in the *status quo* as might be expected, because the power of English was not totally challenged. Some Sinhala and Tamil monolinguals simply gained mobility into middle-rung positions – as teachers, clerks and administrators. The professions and other elite positions were still dominated by the English-educated Sinhala and Tamil middle class. Although protests against Sinhala dominance increased, those really affected by the Sinhala Only Act were Tamil monolinguals. In a sense, then, the linguistic nationalism led by middle-class Tamil politicians was aimed at sharing power with the Sinhala elite by winning electoral support from Tamil monolinguals. Since middle-class Tamil politicians were bilingual, they profited from a social

stratification functioning in their favor. Furthermore, Sinhala nationalism drove Tamils further toward English. Since Tamils faced another colonizing language in Sinhala, they now found English to be a relatively neutral or 'unmarked' language (see Kachru 1986) through which they could find escape from Sinhala dominance. Rather than adopting Sinhala or developing Tamil (which within Sri Lanka had to still take a second place to Sinhala), they channeled their resources into mastering English. Tamils were also exploiting the fact that English was still associated with certain material advantages, both within the island and outside. It has been pointed out that Tamils mastered English more quickly and more proficiently than the Sinhalese did (Halverson 1966) and that they were slower in developing Tamil as an all-purpose national language compared to the Sinhalese (Suseendrarajah 1992). Such practices provided further educational and professional advantages to Tamils – in order to curtail this trend, the Sinhala government had to impose more discriminatory measures.

In general, there was the possibility of a greater spread of English competence as ESL was widely available in the free (non-fee levying) education system instituted after independence. However, exogenous bilinguality (since the settler English community was now absent), the dismantling of the English education system, and the departure of native English teachers affected the high standards of fluency and accuracy previously displayed by some natives. There are other ways in which the democratization of English was hampered: many rural schools still lacked English teachers; while those traditionally possessing English proficiency passed on English to their children through childhood bilinguality, others had to strive through adolescent bilinguality; while the latter formulaically tried to master the grammatical rules in schools, the former developed communicative competence through everyday use at home and in social circles. The English-proficient also found a linguistic criterion to distinguish themselves from the rest in order to maintain their vested interests: even though both their dialects were different from British English, theirs was 'standard Sri Lankan English,' while the dialect of the lower status groups was stigmatized as 'non-standard Sri Lankan English' (Kandiah 1979). Despite efforts to raise the status of Sinhala and Tamil, then, the colonial social stratification still prevailed in a modified form – ensuring in turn the valued status of English.

PLANNING TAMIL ASCENDANCE

Policy perspective

The language policy and politics of the LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) can be considered oppositional not only against the Sinhalese, but also against the politics of the elite bilingual Tamils. In order to provide more material advantages and social status to monolingual folk, the regime insisted on Tamil

Only and Pure Tamil in certain extreme terms when they established their *de facto* state in 1990. This policy also served to prove themselves more Tamil than the middle-class politicians. Their option to use force to fight for a separate Tamil state can be considered a logical extension of the pattern in the history of the island to raise the status of the language through military power. Furthermore, as efforts to create a multilingual polity in Sri Lanka after independence had failed, they found support for the argument that it is only in creating a separate state of homogeneous Tamil community that the mother tongue could be empowered. Furthermore, the regime claimed that the failure of the Tamil politicians lay in negotiating through parliamentary channels and using Gandhian non-violent strategies. Though they argued for official status for Tamil (equal to Sinhala), they still accommodated a place for English (and other languages, including Sinhala, for instrumental and educational purposes). In this sense, their language ideology also displayed a moderate vernacularism (one that favors the promotion of local languages without proscribing English) similar to Gandhi's position (see Ramanathan 2004). But LTTE attributed this ideology to the vested interests of the middle-class leadership. The multilingual and multicultural policy was the way that the bilingual professional class could preserve its class/caste advantage over monolingual Tamils. This line of thinking made LTTE charge that the failure of past politics (i.e. the parliamentary/non-violent struggle) lay precisely in the fact that the traditional Tamil leadership was compromising, selfish, and hypocritical in its representation of the Tamil people. Their own monolingual/monocultural ideology has always been claimed by the LTTE as evidence that they were more faithful to the Tamil cause.

Although LTTE has not constituted statutory bodies to make policy decisions, the most casual pronouncements of the military leaders pass for law in Jaffna. Military officials have publicly insisted on the need to use only Tamil for formal and informal purposes in the community. The local Tamil newspapers periodically carry announcements from the regime that spell out the new 'pure' Tamil words that should be used after a given date in place of foreign borrowings, whether from Sanskrit, Portuguese, or English. For example, 'hotel' was to be called *uNavakam*, 'factory' *toLilakam*, and 'ice cream' *kuLirkaLi*. Signs and billboards using these words are immediately altered to reflect the new usage. In their rallies and speeches, military officials reinforce this linguistic intervention by periodically warning people of the ideological and cultural implications of using English, such as damaging traditional Tamil culture and hindering the nationalist struggle by providing access to unnecessary foreign distractions and a permissive western lifestyle. The regime also uses the civil institutions and political infrastructure under its control to promote the currency of Tamil and to enforce its sole use (cf. Blommaert this issue). They are able to actively police language when they turn back petitions or applications tendered in other languages or in mixed Tamil to the police department, pass office (for movement outside the liberated zone), law courts and village

councils. The policing is more telling in face-to-face verbal interactions like the following:

Text 1: [pass office]⁸

- 1 Officer: *appa koLumpukku een pooriinkaL?*
'So why are you traveling to Colombo?'
- 2 Woman: *makaLinTai wedding-ikku pooren.*
'I am going for my daughter's "wedding".'
- 3 Officer: *enna? unkaLukku tamiL teriyaataa? England-ilai iruntaa vantaniinkal?*
'What? Don't you know Tamil? Have you come here from "England"?''
- 4 Officer: *enkai pooriinkaL?*
'Where are you going?'
- 5 woman: *cari, cari, kaLiyaaNa viiTukku pooren, makan.*
'Okay, okay, I am going to a wedding, son.'

The petitioner's single use of English borrowing doesn't pass unnoticed. Although it takes some time for her to realize her blunder, she corrects herself as her petition can easily be turned down for such mistakes.

The endeavor of the regime to promote Tamil Only and Pure Tamil is indirectly and unwittingly aided by the government's economic and fuel blockade and power cut to the region. The people are thus cut off from channels of information and communication in English (or any other language) from outside the region. The regime itself carries out a censorship of published literature coming into the region. On the other hand, the television and radio transmissions begun on a limited scale by the regime use only Tamil. The newspapers are in Tamil and immediately put into effect the new words and usage prescribed by the regime. Thus the regime is able to carry out its plan of purifying Tamil and enforcing its sole usage through the mass media it controls.

While Tamil is clearly a statutory and symbolic official language, it is also catching on as a working language in many other domains. The previous diglossic situation of strictly compartmentalized functions for English and Tamil has begun leaking somewhat. Formal meetings in educational and professional institutions are now held mostly in Tamil. Ironically, even the Chief Guests' address in the traditional English Day celebrations in local schools is now being delivered in Tamil! The proceedings of the university statutory bodies are increasingly held in Tamil (from what was solely English). Minutes are maintained in both languages. Such gate-keeping processes like interviews and selection tests for jobs are increasingly held in Tamil. There is also strong social pressure not to use English for conversations in informal contexts. Perhaps English still functions as a language of wider communication (enabling interaction with other ethnic groups in the island) and international purposes. That is, spokespersons for the regime communicate in English with

negotiating teams from the Sinhala south and foreign journalists. But the place of English in these situations is not explicitly planned or acknowledged.

It is in the same spirit of pragmatism that the regime also leaves English education unplanned in the regions under its control.⁹ The regime in Jaffna has not legislated definitively on acquisition planning, although it has established a parallel educational system to that of the Sri Lankan government. Though the military regime imposes its ideology on content-based courses, it practically does nothing to encourage the acquisition of English. The regime doesn't provide funding or other resources for the teaching of English. Ironically, because of this vacuum in planning and support, Western agencies like the British Council and the United States Information Agency are able to exert their influence which they have traditionally enjoyed through the Sri Lankan Ministry of Education on curriculum and pedagogy in local schools and universities. Scholars see a need for systematic and comprehensive acquisition planning (see Fernando 1994; Goonetilleke 1983; Hanson-Smith 1984; Raheem and Ratwatte 2004).

There are certain macro-social changes evident as a consequence of the Tamil regime's status planning activities. The raised status of Tamil is both aided by, and resulting in, the emergence of a monolingual elite in this society. The majority of the cadre members and highest officials of the regime are monolingual and come from the previously non-dominant caste/class groups. The traditionally bilingual elite segments of the community from the professional and intellectual circles are now either totally monolingual or L1 dominant. Although the relatively older generation displays better English proficiency, it finds few social contexts for sustained use of the language. While the previously L2 dominant or balanced bilinguals are declining in number, increasingly only L1 dominant or passive bilinguals are found. There is also a shift towards a very pronounced L1 monocultural bilinguality as English has passed out of active use and social pressure encourages solidarity with Tamil culture and its values.

Practice perspective

Granted these general changes in the sociolinguistic profile resulting from the policy of the regime, the community's linguistic practice is nonetheless more complex. Fieldwork on code choice in everyday life shows that English still plays important communicative functions in this society, albeit in slightly altered forms. People negotiate language policies in their favor in their everyday lives in micro-social domains. While the regime posits a particular evaluation of the languages through its status planning activities, the community holds a slightly different estimation of the status and functions of the competing languages in use. What this goes on to suggest is not only the qualified success of the regime's policy, but also the complexity of the socio-political context, historical processes, and the power of English in the post-modern world (see also Blommaert this issue). It is not clear whether the Tamil regime has taken sufficient account of these conflicting realities.

Although social conditions and individual competence do not permit sustained uses of English (beyond a few words or phrases), through modes of code-switching, mixing and borrowing, people still use English in discursively strategic ways. There are circles which display quite visible uses of English in certain typical situations (unknown to the regime). Scholarly and professional groups feel compelled to sprinkle some English during in-group communication as a mark of their learning and status. They realize that the specialized discourses they employ – academic, business, medical, engineering, etc. – are dominated by English and that they themselves derive their identity and authority from that language. Teenagers exchange a few phrases loudly in public to display their participation in international pop culture. This is not merely an understandable middle-class resistance to the extreme nationalistic policies of the regime. The use of English is more widespread. Males of working, farming and fishing groups switch to English to make expressive statements at times of heightened emotions or simply borrow expletives to project a ‘macho,’ urbane, or man-of-the-world image. Almost everyone sees the need to use English for certain functions and identities that English is associated with by virtue of its history in the island.

Ironically, even the regime finds that for certain contexts and discourses English is indispensable despite their own ‘censorship.’ Words related to arms and military activities are in English. Words like shelling, gun boat, supersonic jet, bomber, sentry, heli (which is the local abbreviation for what is ‘copter or chopper in other societies), camp, base, army, navy, sniper, anti-aircraft guns are in the daily lexicon of everybody. The resistance songs officially penned and released by the regime use English borrowings – as in the refrain of a popular lyric:

Text 2: [political lyric]

6 *tuppaakki cattankaL keEtkum*
sel vantu enkaLai taakkum. . .
 ‘gun shots may be heard
 “shell(s)” may blast us. . .’

Similarly, modern Tamil political poetry cannot avoid English mixing, as displayed by the title of a popular poem which also functions as the central metaphor repeated many times in the text: *piiniks* ‘phoenix’ (Pushparajan 1985). Perhaps the regime must acknowledge that English has an association with technology, including military hardware, and also dominates the art of warfare as it does other specialized discourses. Therefore, much against its pronouncements, it is forced to use that language.

Such uses of English are so pervasive, cutting across social and generational boundaries, that English might be considered to have polluted all domains of ‘pure’ Tamil speech. While the low form of diglossic Tamil being code-mixed is perhaps not surprising, even the high form is rarely unmixed. Whereas unmixed English and Tamil are becoming quite marked and uncommon, an

'Englishized Tamil' (or Tamilized English)¹⁰ is becoming the 'unmarked' code (see Scotton 1983) for many contexts. The English forms, whether used as borrowings or code-switches, perform dynamic social and rhetorical functions in a society that displays a high linguistic consciousness. The very fact that people have to make an effort to use unmixed Tamil (as the female petitioner in Text 1 above does) is an indication of the 'naturalness' of Englishized Tamil. At a time when even such simple mixing is frowned upon and 'officially' chastised, the persistence of English in such contexts is quite remarkable. It is also important to realize how the languages are strategically employed by speakers in interpersonal relationships to negotiate values, roles and relationships. Even traditionally monolingual speakers from rural backgrounds can deploy certain English borrowings to claim dual ethos or to straddle both language communities. Note in the example previously cited how the officer (from the rural, monolingual, lower caste group), who chastises the petitioner for using an English loan, himself uses one. Though the Tamilized form of 'England' is *inkilaantu*, he chooses the former. He is probably indicating to the petitioner that his insistence on the vernacular should not mean that he is rustic, ignorant or uneducated. By using English borrowings he is implying to the addressee that he is at home in their culture also.

Monolinguals can strategically employ even the few tokens at their disposal to great symbolic and material advantage. Some L1 dominant bilinguals and monolinguals find in code-switching a strategy for *leveling* the inequalities of power operating in that context (see Heller 1992: 134). In the following conversation, L – a candidate for a faculty position – is able to reduce the distance from P – a bilingual senior professor who interviews him for a faculty position – by effectively code-switching. It is the fact that he possesses at least passive bilingual competence to understand P's utterance that enables him to continue the interaction confidently. Additionally, the familiarity with technical or scholarly vocabulary enables him to claim an academic ethos. Although P continues to speak English and maintain a certain amount of distance (perhaps deliberately, as English provides him power and confirms his identity as a senior scholar), he is eventually forced to take L seriously because of his successful leveling strategies. P finally converges to L's Englishized Tamil in which they can speak as equals. The switch in line 11 signals the success of L's discourse strategy and places him favorably for getting the job and its economic rewards:

Text 3: [interview at the university]

- 7 P: So you have done a masters in sociology? What is your area of research?
- 8 L: *Naan* sociology of religion-*ilai taan* interested. *enllai* thesis topic *vantu* The rise of local deities in the Jaffna peninsula.
 'It is in the "sociology of religion" that I am "interested". My "thesis topic" was "The rise of local deities in the Jaffna peninsula".'

- 9 P: Did this involve a field work?
- 10 L: *oom, oru ethnographic study-ai taan itay ceitanaan. kiTTattatTa*
four years-*ai* field work *ceitanaan*.
'Yes, I did this as an "ethnographic study". I did "field work" for
roughly "four years".'
- 11 P: *appa koofa* qualitative research *taan ceiyiraniir?*
'So you do mostly "qualitative research"?'

We must note that speaking unmixed Tamil in this context would have displayed a poor image of the candidate, exposed glaringly his incompetence, and accentuated the status difference between the interlocutors. Although L lacks the ability to form complete sentences in English, his switches are strategic. The English phrases he uses are not oft-used loans in the wider society; they are specialized vocabulary. The phrases are well formed, although in being the clichés of academia these would not have demanded much competence from the speaker. Combined with an acceptable 'educated Sri Lankan' pronunciation (i.e.,/sta^di/ rather than /ista^di/) L is able to project a formidable image of himself. In gate-keeping situations, then, code-switching becomes handy for those limited in English competence.

Bilingual elites, for their part, are forced to use some Tamil even in conventionally English-Only contexts, in order to court ethnic solidarity. After an English drama competition in a school, when the judge began his prefatory comments before reading out the awards to an avid student audience, the formal silence of the auditorium was punctured by two sarcastic calls in English: 'Don't speak in English!' and 'We can't understand you!' (fieldnotes, 07-03-1992). The audacity of the claim (coupled with the irony of saying this in a language the speakers claim not to know) however gained serious attention and the speaker was forced thereafter to self-translate his comments. We must not fail to note the subtle power struggle here: if the speaker had persisted in speaking English, ignoring the veiled threat of the audience, the latter would have booed and jeered him off the stage (as monolinguals were clearly in the majority in the auditorium) with serious damage to the status and identity of the 'judge.' In effect, the monolingual audience holds the threat of drawing an 'elite closure' (Myers-Scotton 1990), almost bluntly excluding the English-speaking 'judge' from their circle. Therefore, even if English is the conventional code for this context, the judge has to give in to the use of Tamil (marked in this context). This strategy of self-translation – first uttering a unit of thought in English and then paraphrasing it in Tamil – is an effective reconciliation of the conflict facing the judge. While he is asserting his right to use the conventional code for the context (and thus saving face among the educated bilingual circles who will consider his use of Tamil a scandal), he is also making a concession to the immediate audience by using Tamil. While this strategy then enables him to maintain solidarity with the educated bilingual community, it also wins him the respect of the monolinguals. He is thus able to invoke dual

identities at once – class and ethnicity. This strategy is increasingly adopted by English-speaking bilinguals to accommodate to monolingual addressees in formal contexts. While they retain the use of English as dictated by status considerations, they intersperse Tamil to enjoy ethnic solidarity.

In the light of the ethnographic study on the everyday language choice of the people we can draw the following schema for the manner in which people assign functions for the languages. Certain discourses are characterized by a heavily Englishized Tamil: politics, military activity, music, cinema, sex and romance, education, medicine, law, current affairs, fashion, western cuisine, and travel. Certain other discourses are conducted in relatively unmixed Tamil: folk religious rituals, folk arts, domestic relations, folk/rural cultural practices, local cooking, and dress. Unmixed Sanskrit is used for orthodox Hindu temple rituals, and a Sanskritized Tamil for religious/philosophical discourses and the arts (such as Bharata Natyam) belonging to the Hindu classical culture. In terms of situations, the language of formal use could be Tamil (in rural, traditional or Hindu institutions) or English (in urban, administrative, educational and professional institutions). Mixing is relatively less common in formal use. In semi-formal or semi-official contexts (in educational and vocational sites) and informal contexts (in family relationships, friendship or polite social intercourse) an Englishized Tamil is in use. However, all this should be qualified by a consideration of the addressee: those who appear educated, rich, urban, professional and of the older generation are expected to reciprocate in English; those with the reverse identities are expected to possess less competence in English or code-switching. This pattern of usage suggests then that, notwithstanding the pronouncements of the regime, English is still employed by the people for certain discourses, contexts and functions, to symbolize certain values, identities and roles, or to claim material rewards in their daily social interaction. Thus we realize that at the micro-social domain language choice is still open to negotiation, much against the regime's attempt to legislate usage in a top-down manner.

Accounting for the inconsistencies

What socio-political factors account for the continued life of English despite the stringent nationalistic policy of the political leadership? In an intriguing paradox, it is at a period when Tamil nationalism is most dominant and politically successful that the community is most 'internationalist.' The community is aware of, linked with, and influenced by the West as perhaps never before in history. This is partly because the nationalist struggle has had to be 'internationalized' for its success. There are Tamil lobbying groups in Western capitals requesting governments to stop supplying arms and funds to Sri Lanka, while seeking recognition for Eelam. Tamil information centers in the West operate telephone hot lines, electronic news networks, and discussion groups to keep the world informed about the struggle. Furthermore, the need for arms and specialized training requires liaison with foreign military and diplomatic

officials. In all these situations the military regime itself realizes the need for English. But since much of this activity is outside Jaffna and clandestine, the use of English is not openly acknowledged. In addition, as a side effect of the fighting, thousands of Tamils have sought economic and political refuge in European cities. The local community is very much in touch with the diaspora, and in most cases people are able to survive in war-ravaged Jaffna only through cash and gifts sent by their acquaintances abroad. Most people themselves expect to go abroad as political or economic refugees and, thus, are aware of the need for an international language.

Furthermore, behind the local institutions of education, commerce and communications looms the international currency of English – a hegemony which even the Sinhala government could not resist. So a mother sending a telegram or telex to her refugee son in Sweden would have to write it in English for the local postal department. Besides, the community still sees the necessity for English in order to vie for the material and symbolic advantages deriving from educational and professional modes of advancement. Someone wishing to obtain a certificate in accountancy or architecture (issued by an international professional institute) will have to study and write the test in English. To lay claim to the wider range of jobs, resources, and opportunities available in the international market, local people know that they need English. While Tamil is useful for the jobs and resources available in the local context, English functions as the economic and symbolic capital for translocal opportunities.

All this would make us expect the evolving social stratification to be more complex than a simple case of Tamil monolinguals enjoying status. Although a new monolingual elite has emerged into prominence as stated earlier, English still sustains the status of the bilingual, professional elite who traditionally dominated this society. It is fit therefore to speak of two parallel elite in Jaffna: the bilinguals dominating the professions enjoy social status and economic security but hold no political clout; the monolinguals dominating the local administration and politico-military hierarchy enjoy significant power (with some local status) but lack economic security. This is because the more lucrative and secure professions value bilingual competence. It is still important, however, for the bilinguals to display proficiency in Tamil in order to appeal to the ethnic solidarity that will consolidate their power, and for the monolinguals to at least code-switch in English to project an educated and urbane ethos that will bolster their new class status.

Because English is quite well embedded in the society, to the extent of influencing its stratification, we are unable to limit its role as simply a language of wider communication or international purposes. It still has functionality in intra-community relations. English is so much part of this social formation that it functions dynamically to negotiate meanings, identities and material rewards in the day-to-day, face-to-face interactions from the lowest strata onwards (see also Blommaert this issue). Specifically through code-switching, people are subtly resisting the prescriptions of the regime and the dominant

ideology proscribing English. Perhaps it is code-switching that enables them to do this. People are able to get away with using English since they are using it in or with Tamil. This enables them to give the illusion to others (and perhaps themselves) that they are using only Tamil – but when circumstances change, they claim the benefits of English. Code alternation thus provides a way for reconciling the tensions between the two languages – and the values and identities embodied by each. That mixing of codes can enable a speech community to reconcile the psychological and socio-cultural tensions it faces between two conflicting languages and, thus, maintain bilingualism is now well noted in sociolinguistic literature (see Romaine 1989: 39). This seems to be a convenient option for post-colonial communities which encounter conflicts between English and the vernacular. They negotiate ethnic and global interests through code-switching, as in the French/English switching in Moncton, New Brunswick (Blanc and Hamers 1982), and in Toronto and Montreal (see Heller 1992, 1999). We have more examples of how code-switching is used by local teachers and students to negotiate values and identities in classrooms as diverse as India (Ramanathan 2004), South Africa (Probyn 2005), Tanzania (Brock-Utne 2005), Kenya (Bunyi 2005), Brunei (Martin 2005), Singapore (Rubdy 2005), and Hong Kong (Luk 2005).

REVISITING POLICY CONSTRUCTS

In the context of the above narrative, how do we explain the qualified success of the military regime's policy of Tamil Only and Pure Tamil? Can we say that efforts to raise the status of the vernacular are doomed to failure as they go against the power of geopolitical, historical, and economic forces which favor English? Are the subtle forms of resistance by the people against the policies of the regime in recognition of globalization and the hegemony of English? Is the Tamil regime engaged in a romantic exercise that goes against pragmatism and common sense? Critics of MLR may point out that since vernaculars are of limited utility in contemporary society, minority communities will perceive the attempts to promote vernaculars with disdain. They point out that MLR activities smack of backwardness, encouraging the ghettoization of minority communities (see Brutt-Griffler 2002; Edwards 2001; Ladefoged 1992). At any rate, as Brutt-Griffler points out, such attempts exemplify 'utopian wishes in the face of harsh realities' (2002: 222). Though the linguistic divergences against the Tamil regime's policy at the interpersonal level needs to be explained (see below), we mustn't ignore the real changes achieved at the macro-social level even within the short period of about a decade or so of raising the status of Tamil. The regime's language policy is not a complete failure. We see the following developments: Tamil language is being increasingly used for institutional and official purposes in the Tamil homeland; Tamil monolinguals, who formerly felt like strangers in their own land, now get their official

work done easily (and gone are the army of interpreters, translators, and stenographers who made a living by helping monolinguals navigate bureaucracy); there is a new monolingual elite which is attaining greater social status; corpus planning has taken new urgency as new words are being coined for many domains and Tamil is being used for more specialized discourses; Tamil is gaining more currency, demanding usage by even L2 dominant bilinguals in order to claim local prestige and ethnic solidarity; at the transnational level, Tamil language is contributing to ethnic pride, as people in the diaspora appreciate the advances made in the homeland by the political leadership.

Even if no tangible benefits had been achieved, we would have to concede the right of the military regime to engage in raising the status of Tamil. Arguments about the impotence of vernaculars in the modern world by critics of MLR are loaded with assumptions of determinism, impersonality, and inevitability (see Edwards 2001). It is as if nothing can be done against the power of dominant languages, which appear to have achieved dominance through the 'natural' processes of historical and economic forces. This attitude can lead to what May (2003) calls a 'resigned language realism' that holds that, though language loss is regrettable, there is nothing that can be done about this. However, we have to understand the place of political agency (often hidden) in the ascendancy of powerful languages. More specifically, military power has often bolstered the power of languages. Minority communities also have a right to use political activism to redress power imbalances. We may say that LTTE is simply following the pattern behind the ascendancy of other languages in the local context. They see that in every past occasion military force has buttressed the raising of the status of a specific language. English was imposed in the island by the power of Britain's imperial might, after intense battles with other European powers and local kingdoms. Later, after Independence, Tamil democratic negotiations for language rights were suppressed by Sinhala violence in the form of state-sponsored riots and, eventually, military occupation of the Tamil homeland. The lesson LTTE has drawn from this history is that languages don't come to power by themselves. They are aided by guns and swords. Though Tamil ascendancy has had to take the form of a violent conflict with the Sinhalese, resulting in the death of more than 50,000 people, it is this form that political agency takes in this context. Tamil militancy is the outcome of the forces at play in the history of language politics in this island. Therefore, minority communities have a right to engage in political activism in favor of their languages. Of course, once efforts to raise the status of vernaculars are underway, changes in attitudes and functions often follow, albeit slowly.

Individual versus group interests

We still have to explain the resistance to the regime's Tamil-Only policy at the interpersonal level. Some scholars may explain this as the efforts of individuals

to satisfy their personal interests against the determinism of group interests. Critics of MLR have argued that it is unwise to make arguments for languages on behalf of social collectives as the individuals in the community have their own valuation of different languages, based on different socio-economic interests and motivations to learn or use these languages (see Bentahila and Davies 1993; Brutt-Griffler 2002; Edwards 1985). One interest that might motivate individuals to go against group interests is social and economic mobility. When the imposition of mother tongue is perceived as being motivated by sentimental and symbolic interests, and limiting one's mobility, individuals will diverge from their group's interests and seek to learn the dominant languages to advance their personal socio-economic prospects. From this perspective, individuals make their decisions based on rational choices, against which sentimental or symbolic group interests are futile (cf. Ricento this issue).

However, individuals are not always suppressed by group interests. Both interests can be complementary. We can understand this point of view only if we realize that individual desire to learn English has never meant mobility in the Sri Lankan context. Even during colonial times, access to English was controlled to serve the needs of the colonizers. Not every individual who wanted to learn English could afford English education. Furthermore, a knowledge of English language didn't mean professional advancement. English education only permitted employment at the clerical level, much to the disappointment of local people who dreamed of positions in the professions. This history was repeated after independence. The bilingual middle class maintained its vested interests in controlling the spread of English and the rewards associated with it. English was not only unavailable universally, even those who had the opportunity to learn the language anew were classified as inferior by virtue of their accent and dialect (which corresponded to class and caste differences). As mentioned earlier, those who speak 'standard Sri Lankan English' are considered eligible for the advances English brings – and these speakers are traditional bilinguals from the dominant *Vellala* caste and professional class groups. What is happening in the case of contemporary Jaffna after Tamil ascendancy is that some of the previously disadvantaged groups are able to enjoy more social and economic rewards by virtue of the new status of Tamil in the local context. Consolidating these new-found gains from the resources offered by Tamil, they move on to make a claim for the advantages associated with English.

From this perspective, the acts of linguistic resistance against Tamil Only may be perceived as attempts to build on the advances made by the Tamil regime's language policy and move on to additional benefits that this policy doesn't address. In other words, this is not a rejection of the regime's policy but an attempt to complement it with additional interests. Therefore, the language policy still has value for the interests of individual mobility. Without the raised status of Tamil, the monolinguals will be doubly disadvantaged – deprived of the benefits of Tamil as well as English. Therefore, the policy of mother tongue

revival and language shift initiated by the regime is not in opposition to the interests of individual mobility – it enables mobility. (How the English-dominant bilinguals negotiate the Tamil-Only policy to negotiate their own individual interests will be discussed later.)

Class versus ethnicity

Another explanation for the deviations from the regime's policy is that class interests are always opposed to ethnicity and mother tongue affiliations. Critics of MLR argue that the desire to move up the class ladder would motivate members of a minority community to disregard their ethnic identity and learn dominant languages (see Brutt-Griffler 2002). John Edwards (1985: 95–97) makes a more cynical connection when he points out that local elites may evoke ethnic sentiments and insist on mother tongue usage to limit the mobility of others in the community. But the connection between class and ethnicity is more complicated in Jaffna. It can be argued that the post-Independence Tamil political leadership, which comes predominantly from educated professional classes and the *Vellala* caste, proposed a moderate policy of parity for Tamil with Sinhala in a multilingual polity that accommodated English in an effort to benefit from its English bilingualism and to share the national resources equally with the Sinhala bilingual elite. At least this is the argument of the current military leadership that comes from the fishing community of *Karayar* caste in the Northwestern tip of Jaffna peninsula (and includes in the cadre others from peasant/working class groups and other lower castes). The desire to promote Tamil monolingualism is in the interest of the group that the current military leadership represents. As this group has been historically dominated by the bilingual Tamil professional/middle class, its class interests are served by bringing up ethnicity as the important consideration. As we saw, the shift in language status does help to create a new class, contributing to a parallel elite of Tamil monolinguals to match the traditional bilingual elite. Therefore, the monolingualist policy in favor of ethnic identity helps the previously underprivileged groups to move up the class ladder.

The traditional elite themselves change their ideological positioning and negotiate ethnicity differently now in order to maintain their class interests. They are unable to enjoy their advantages in the new dispensation without invoking ethnic solidarity and courting Tamil identity. Also, important jobs in the local community cannot be performed without Tamil language, which has now become the sole working language in local institutions. Therefore, the traditional elite groups now code-switch to Tamil and move towards an L1 dominant bilingualism in order to enjoy the status they have previously enjoyed in this community. Thus, ethnicity is important for the class advantages of both the traditional elite and the traditionally disempowered groups. What we realize, then, is that the dichotomy generally made between class and ethnicity by critics of MLR is not valid in the case of the Tamil community. Just as individual

claims are being negotiated within group interests, so are class considerations negotiated diversely in relation to ethnic identity.

Sentimental versus instrumental value

The active manner in which English and Tamil are negotiated for social status and economic rewards in the Tamil homeland encourages us to reconsider another dichotomy in MLR discourse: that the vernacular represents merely sentimental value, while English represents instrumental value (see May 2003, this issue). Criticism against vernacular empowerment has been informed by the assumption that minority languages have only nostalgic and affective value, evoking symbolic pride in a mythic past, tradition, and auto-momy (Edwards 2001). From this way of looking at the connection, the vernacular is expendable if not useless, while English and other dominant languages have utilitarian value, leading to progress and modernity. But what we find in the Tamil situation is that vernacular empowerment does hold instrumental value. The promotion of Tamil language has served different social and economic interests for different groups in the Tamil community. Even the extreme (what may be considered chauvinistic) version of Tamil promotion serves the intranational interests of monolingual lower caste communities to gain more status, jobs, and economic opportunities. From being strangers in their land, when English or Sinhala was the language of education and institutional life, Tamil monolinguals are now able to gain a measure of control over their lives. It is true that Tamil does not hold many prospects for socio-economic rewards in the international marketplace. But we have to understand the pragmatic/utilitarian value of a language in both national and international terms. Though Tamil may not have much value for international life, there are people who care about the rewards and resources available in intracommunity and national contexts from the use of the vernacular.

What might be less easy to understand is that even English is not without affective/sentimental value in post-colonial contexts after its history of 300 years in these lands (see also Blommaert this issue). For both the professional/bilingual and peasant/monolingual classes in Sri Lanka, English is associated with certain positive values. As historians of language relations have pointed out, there has been a veritable English 'craze' in the whole island during and after colonialism. Local cultural scholars have noted that post-colonial Jaffna has always been characterized by an ideological/cultural hybridity that accommodates a positive estimation of English and the values it represents. On the one hand, there is the Saiva-Tamil discourse articulated by Hindu revivalist Arumuga Navalar that displays a religio-linguistic chauvinism and also endorses caste hierarchy; on the other hand, there exists a liberal-democratic discourse inculcated by the missionary English-educational institutions and epitomized later by the Youth Congress of 1936 which militantly opposed casteism besides encouraging interaction with other cultures and 'enlightened'

contemporary philosophies (see Sivatamby 1990). Local scholars now note that rather than being contradictory influences, these tendencies influence each other in many subtle ways. They modify and even feed into each other. So the revivalist Saiva-Tamil discourse of nationalism is considerably complemented by the liberal Western values of anti-casteism, pro-feminism, and multilingualism.

Furthermore, the Tamil people's positive attribution of English has to be understood in relation to the Sinhala language. With Sinhala as the greater threat to their advancement, Tamil people have found a way out through English language for education, socio-economic mobility, and transnational connections. Many Tamils therefore associate English with liberal values and an urbane cosmopolitan ethos. Perhaps Kachru (1986) goes too far when he says English is an 'unmarked code' in the context of rigid caste, regional, and ethnic markings represented by local languages. I would say that English has a marking of its own – including negative markings, especially for social groups traditionally dispossessed of it. However, the marginalized groups too covet the positive values associated with English in Jaffna. This is what explains the deployment of even meager English borrowings in conversations by traditionally monolingual people (in the data above; see also Blommaert this issue). Proponents of MLR should then understand that English may not always have negative values and connotations in post-colonial contexts. A dichotomous view of English versus vernacular may lead to that impression. But we have to see the dialectic between these languages in relation to the other languages and communities in the post-colonial context. English can have positive values for people whose local languages and identities suffer from discriminatory markings of caste, ethnicity, and gender.

Ethnicity versus language

This realization would make us orientate to language identities in a more complex way. What does it mean to be a Tamil? Do Tamil ethnicity and Tamil language have an isomorphic connection? Does one imply the other? Not only are local identities hybrid (shaped by a mixture of English and Tamil) as we see above, they can also be fluid, shifting, and strategically renegotiated according to changing social contexts. Tamil identity has been defined differently through history. We now know that during the colonial period the Tamils were not averse to learning English as long as they were not converted to Christianity. In fact, Hindu reformists started their own schools for English education as an alternative to missionary schools which had an explicit policy of conversion (Chelliah 1922). What this suggests is that at that time religion was the core value (Smolicz 1980) of ethnolinguistic identity for Tamil people. But language gradually became the core value after independence when the dominant community declared Sinhala the official language. Being Tamil now means not speaking Sinhala as the first language. (It is ironic that in

pre-colonial times, being Tamil could accommodate being Buddhist and also speaking Sinhala from birth – a combination that has become difficult now.) This equation (that being Tamil is opposed to being Sinhala) still leaves English free for accommodation into Tamil identity.

However, English/Tamil bilingualism has to be contextually negotiated, as we see in the code-switching data earlier. Since the nationalistic ideological climate means that (at least outwardly) everyone has to be staunchly committed to pro-Tamil identity, even Tamils who were earlier monolingual in English or displayed an L2-dominant bilingualism are using more Tamil now to invoke ethnic solidarity. However, people resist the imposition of monolingual/monocultural identity encouraged by the Tamil Only and Pure Tamil policy by code-switching to English. The chauvinistic vernacular ideology promoted in some quarters grates against people's hybrid identity.

This realization shouldn't lead us to the extreme position adopted by critics of MLR that language affiliations don't matter anymore as identities are hybrid, socially constructed, and changing (see Bentahila and Davies 1993; Eastman 1984; Edwards 1985). Cynics may conclude that ethnic identity and mother tongue affiliation are unstable or unsuitable grounds on which to build MLR claims. But we mustn't forget that these attachments do have value for local people despite the changes and complexification of their identity through history. Hybridity of identity doesn't change the fact that ethnicity and mother tongue have always been potent forces in community relations (May 2001). Change doesn't mean irrelevance or irreverence. Attachments to ethnicity and mother tongue are resilient, despite their limited value in pragmatic and material terms. We see from the data that though English is desired by all social groups in the Tamil community, ethnic identity and Tamil language still hold a greater level of importance in their ideological and psychological make up. This is what encourages the community to send their children – sometimes as young as ten to fifteen years old – to fight against the state and die as suicide bombers. Sentimental attachments can be dangerously functional sometimes! The militant struggle for separation has been sustained by the community for more than two decades by this ethnic identity. So hybridity doesn't nullify the languages/identities involved in the mix. Some components of this hybrid complex apparently have greater relevance and social importance for the communities concerned.

The inevitability of English?

The reality of cultural and individual hybridity in post-colonial communities is used by critics of MLR to argue for the inevitability of English in contemporary life. For reasons of modern history and contemporary processes of globalization, English is perceived as non-negotiable in any debate on mother tongue versus English (Brutt-Griffler 2002). However, we mustn't overemphasize the desire for English in post-colonial communities. The use of English is not

unconditional. It is clear from the conversational data above that the community is using English on its own terms. The pervasive code-switching suggests that English is made impure through mixing with Tamil. Tamils are accommodating English in a way that it will fit into their ethos. In other words, they are vernacularizing – or Tamilizing – English!

This appropriation of English attains radical implications in local ESL classrooms. As I indicated earlier, since the military regime has failed to prescribe an English acquisition policy for schools, the center-based ELT discourse of English Only influences local curriculum and pedagogy. Although teachers insisted in interviews with me that they used or permitted only English – predisposed by their training, teaching material and prescribed methods – classroom data showed a preponderance of code-switching (see Canagarajah 1995b, 1999). Generally, students and teachers code-switch to Tamil in sites and interactions defined as unofficial or non-pedagogical. This classroom negotiation of codes is motivated by identity and group membership of teachers and students. In the English class, teachers not only belong to a bilingual cosmopolitan anglicized class, but are also members of the Tamil monolingual community; students are, similarly, not only learners of English who are aspiring for membership in the bilingual community, but also members of the Tamil monolingual community. The code-switching indicates how they ‘manage’ both these identities. Whereas they can (and must) play the role of ‘English teachers’ and ‘English students’ in situations clearly framed as pedagogical, in other contexts they are ill at ease in these roles. In such contexts, they shift to Tamil to symbolize their vernacular solidarity. Eventually, there was more acquisition of Englishized Tamil and practice of code-switching than of pure English (which was reserved for text-book based readings and exercises).

There is thus a hidden curriculum that has dual implications for language acquisition: the unmixed English consciously *learnt* is product-oriented and abstract; the language unconsciously *acquired* with communicative competence is code alternated. This duality reflects the attitudes and needs of the students: learning pure/formal English is out of the compulsion to satisfy the school ESL requirement and distant transnational purposes; code-switching is eagerly practiced for locally significant everyday social interactions. How such processes of local appropriation in many post-colonial settings is leading to the pluralization of English, complicating its power and ownership, is a topic outside the scope of this paper but no less relevant to theoretical discussions on language planning in post-colonial communities (see further Canagarajah 2004).

We must not fail to note the radicalism behind this code-switching activity. Just as local people resist the regime’s Tamil-Only monolingual policy, they also resist the educational policy of English Only in the ESL programs. This realization introduces us to an ignored dimension in MLR debates – the agency of people in negotiating languages, policies, and power in their favor. Local and international policy makers, as well as LPP scholars, often forget this factor in

their deliberations (see also Blommaert this issue; Patrick this issue). In the Sri Lankan case, the military regime forgets that local people have many creative strategies in everyday life to negotiate the extreme Tamil Only and Pure Tamil ideologies it has instituted. The ELT establishment (represented locally by English teachers and administrators) forgets that in micro-level classroom life students and teachers are going to negotiate the unreal English-Only policy (especially of the standard British or American variety) in ESL courses. Furthermore, scholars in LPP forget that there are so many intermediary positions between 'mother tongue versus English' for local people. To return to MLR debates, critics who argue for the unqualified need for English for social development and individual mobility ignore the ways in which local people appropriate English to serve their own needs and interests. MLR proponents who argue for the unqualified need for the mother tongue overlook the ways in which local people go beyond that, developing more complex forms of subjectivity and culture.

It is clear from the data what kind of policy the Tamil people desire. Ideally they expect societal multilingualism, with protection for Tamil and tolerance for English. They view multilingualism as a resource. They desire some scope for individual choice, along with governmental protection of ethnic group interests that would ensure rights and resources for monolingual Tamils. For this reason, they desire the promotion of Tamil in institutional and official contexts, ensuring its use in more domains and in all social groups (including the previously English-dominant professional classes). The people are, therefore, ideologically distancing themselves from the chauvinistic tendencies of the regime and opting for a form of social pluralism (that is still rooted in Tamil language and culture). This pattern of language choice goes beyond the usual dichotomies of mother tongue or dominant language, individual or collective rights, preservation or mobility, and ethnic identity or global ethos. Even if we can think of an ideal policy that can accommodate all these concerns, it is clear that political leadership won't sponsor such a policy. The Tamil Only and Pure Tamil ideology is the rationale for the ascendancy of LTTE. The reason they won the leadership in the struggle for Tamil rights from the previous bilingual professional *Vellala* caste political leaders is because they could come up with a more populist and radical slogan. Their policy provides a clear alternative to the majority of the Tamil people (monolingual, peasant/working class, lower caste) and symbolizes the corrective to what is now perceived as the hypocritical, piecemeal, compromising politics of the previous leadership. Therefore, to give up their language policy is political death for LTTE. We have to realize here the ideological character of language policies (see Moore 1996). Language policies are not always based on scholarly/expert discourses, rational choices, or cost/benefit calculations. This is news only for the dominant *rational or positivist tradition* in LPP, which assumes that efficient policies can be formulated and social life engineered from objective assessments of the needs, processes, and outcomes of language relationships (see Ricento and Hornberger 1996).

However, the Tamil regime is not ignorant or utopian to think that its extreme nationalistic/monolingual policy can be enforced unilaterally and unconditionally. We see from the narrative above that it has provided unacknowledged spaces for the use of English in the community. For example, it has left the ELT program in schools and universities unplanned. Even private English tutorials in Jaffna function without interference from the military regime. Furthermore, the military leaders themselves employ a great deal of English outside the public eye for negotiations with non-local agencies for funding, arms, lobbying, and publicity. What this suggests is that the military regime is not interested in establishing a leak-proof language policy, contrary to the impression locally given of ironclad law enforcement. They recognize that language policy is a symbolic statement for political purposes. Practice has to – and will – differ. It is these gaps in policy that people themselves use to negotiate their interests for individual and class mobility. It appears then that both parties (i.e. regime and subjects; leadership and common people) are happy with the inconsistencies and tensions in policy. They first assure themselves of their ethnic pride and linguistic autonomy with the stated policies, and then negotiate their divergent interests in the gaps between the policy/practice divide. Different class and caste groups negotiate their interests in relation to their ethnicity. Individuals negotiate their interests in relation to community rights.

CONCLUSION

This is not an argument for a *laissez faire* attitude to LPP or the adoption of *methodological individualism* (Banton 1987; Hechter 1987; see also Ricento this issue) as the answer for post-colonial dilemmas of English versus the vernacular. Critics of MLR would prefer that nation-states simply ensure equal rights for all citizens and let social life evolve from rational individual choices (as Brutt-Griffler 2002, for example, seems to opt for in answer to such dilemmas). It is important for minority groups to struggle for their group rights, and seek to protect their interests, as languages do not survive or come to power 'naturally.' Though we should help communities and policy makers to see the tensions, conflicts, and inconsistencies in their practice in order to formulate more coherent agendas, we should be more realistic about the possibilities of coming up with leak-proof policies, rationalistic models, and all-encompassing plans that assure the rights of multifarious social groups and individuals in a community. The Sri Lankan case makes us appreciate that policies are ideological and should be situated in the relevant historical and political context of specific communities. An important responsibility for critical LPP scholars is to help people see how they can negotiate their own interests in imperfect (and often unfair) current policies. In this regard, policy makers should recognize the agency of subaltern communities to negotiate language politics in creative

and critical ways that transcend the limited constructs scholars formulate to either cynically sweep aside or unduly romanticize fundamental human rights.

NOTES

1. The term 'vernacular' is somewhat ambiguous (cf. Blommaert this issue), as the paper develops the argument that English too is becoming vernacularized in the local community. The use of the term 'mother tongue' might be an alternative. However, it is becoming outmoded in the context of multilingualism, as people increasingly acquire more than one language from their childhood, sometimes with parents themselves speaking different languages. As such, while acknowledging the ambiguity of the term vernacular, I will use it predominantly in this paper, along with local language(s). I do though use the term 'mother tongue' occasionally in the paper to refer to local discourses on language rights. The term *taai moLi* (mother tongue), for example, is used for Tamil by local political leaders and community members in this respect.
2. See volume 3, number 2, 2004, of the *Journal of Language, Identity, and Education*.
3. The boundaries of this *de facto* state have been changing, depending on the power shifts from the ongoing military engagement between the Tamils and the Sri Lankan state. Some of the areas where this data was obtained in the 1990–1994 period (which many local scholars consider the high point of LTTE dominance) have now come under the control of the Sri Lankan army.
4. Though the data are somewhat dated, the trends and strategies of bilingual communication that I describe here still apply to the Tamil community in the regions of the North and East that LTTE controls. Furthermore, the question of Tamil nationhood hasn't been solved. The attitudes and relationship between Sinhala and Tamil communities remain unchanged.
5. The two sections here discuss language policies in relation to the whole of Sri Lanka, focusing on the implications for the Tamil community. It is in the following section, 'Planning Tamil Ascendance,' that I discuss policies exclusively from the perspective of the Tamils. This is because the Tamils didn't have their own policy-making body till the inception of the military struggle for a separate state.
6. The labels used in this paper for the dimensions and types of bilinguality follow the definitions of Hamers and Blanc (1989: 6–14).
7. Cooper offers the following definitions for certain distinctions in official language status: statutory: 'those languages which a government has specified as official, or declared as appropriate, by law'; working: 'a language which a government uses as a medium for its day-to-day activities'; symbolic: 'a language which a government uses as a medium for symbolic purposes, that is, as a symbol of the state' (1989: 100).
8. Words in italics are in Tamil. They are translated into English within quotation marks. English utterances that are neither italicized nor placed within quotes were originally uttered in English.
9. Kachru (1991) notes that the unplanned option is very common and quite functional in English acquisition planning in post-colonial states.
10. Distinguishing the matrix (or syntactic base) of code-switched utterances is still controversial in sociolinguistic scholarship (see Myers-Scotton 1992). My data on Englishized Tamil in this paper contain English items in Tamil matrix and *vice*

versa. Also note that the term code-switching is being increasingly used as an umbrella term to accommodate a wide range of code alternation strategies, including borrowing. Myers-Scotton (1992) sees the need to make a distinction on structural grounds (that is, borrowed items are better integrated into the matrix), although she grants that borrowing can serve rhetorical functions as in code-switching. In this paper I follow her practice of retaining the term borrowing on structural grounds, but allowing for its possibility of constituting rhetorically and socially significant code-switching activity.

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