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# Between Convergence and Divergence: Reformatting Language Purism in the Montreal Tamil Diasporas

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*This article examines how ideologies of language purism are reformatted by creating inter-discursive links across spatial and temporal scales. I trace convergences and divergences between South Asian and Québécois sociohistorical regimes of language purism as they pertain to the contemporary experiences of Montreal's Tamil diasporas. Indian Tamils and Sri Lankan Tamils in Montreal emphasize their status differences by claiming that the former speak a modern "vernacular" Tamil and the latter speak an ancient "literary" Tamil. The segregation and purification of these social groups and languages depend upon the intergenerational reproduction of scalar boundaries between linguistic forms, interlocutors, and decentered contexts. [Tamils, Quebec, diaspora, linguistic purism, spatiotemporal scales]*

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**M**ontreal is situated within the Canadian province of Quebec, a self-identifying francophone nation that seeks to be recognized as a "distinct society" within North America<sup>1</sup> (Lemco 1994). This society's ever-present fear of being engulfed by a demographically expanding, English-speaking populace has contributed to a heightened level of metalinguistic awareness among French-speaking Québécois citizens. For the residents of Montreal, this metalinguistic awareness appears to be even more acute. Often characterized by scholars, politicians, and media as an inassimilable, globalizing element located within the otherwise cohesive social imaginary of the Quebec nation (Handler 1988; Létourneau 2004), Montreal's multiethnic and multilingual population is commonly assumed by the rest of Quebec as not sharing in the same ideological vision of a linguistically "pure" Quebec nation. The perception that Montreal's ethnic minorities may destabilize Quebec's modern national order has contributed, at various points in the 20th and early 21st centuries, to their discursive representation as perpetual *étrangers* (foreigners), i.e., a displaced people whose linguistic and cultural practices mark them as permanently "out-of-place" and "out-of-time" within Quebec.<sup>2</sup>

Contrary to this view, many ethnic minorities in Montreal actually endorse Quebec's dominant ideology of linguistic purism and pursue similar purist agendas in local diaspora institutions. For example, some community leaders of Montreal's Tamil diasporas are concerned with maintaining purist standards for the language socialization of Tamil-Québécois youth.<sup>3</sup> It is not uncommon to hear first generation Tamils complain that second generation Tamil-Québécois youth should not mix

Tamil, English, and French languages. Consider the following vignette narrated to me by a second generation Sri Lankan Tamil-Québécois woman, Selvamani, concerning her encounter with an upper-middle class, first generation Sri Lankan Tamil elder at a local Hindu temple:

One day an influential patron of the temple notices that my younger sister and I are sitting on the temple steps, switching between French and Tamil. He immediately chastises us by asking, in Tamil, "Why don't you girls speak in Tamil?" When he turns around to leave, he resumes his conversation with his daughter in English and Tamil.

The punch line of Selvamani's narrative is that ideologies of linguistic purism are easily unmasked to reveal underlying preoccupations with social status. That code-switching between Tamil and French but not Tamil and English annoys this first generation, upper-middle class elder discloses two paradoxical tendencies: first, that he esteems English, not French, as a high status language and, second, that his limited linguistic repertoire in Tamil and English but not French portends a loss of socioeconomic status in bilingual Montreal and francophone Quebec. Furthermore, the fact that Selvamani can more readily appreciate the irony of the Tamil elder's position indexes her comparatively elevated metalinguistic acuity. These findings suggest that the study of ideologies of linguistic purism in Montreal must take into account individuals' varying levels of metapragmatic awareness concerning signs of linguistic and social change.

It is also important to note that the efficacy of purist campaigns is highly context-sensitive and boundary-dependent. Despite the elder's attempt to negatively depict French-Tamil multilingualism as eroding the sanctified boundaries of the Sri Lankan Tamil temple, the sisters successfully exploit the liminality of their peripheral location on the temple steps, their transitory status as youth, and their in-between identity as Tamil-Québécois to freely narrate this story to me in mixed codes of Québécois *joual*, Québécois French, Sri Lankan Tamil, and English.<sup>4</sup> Within the context of Montreal proper, their French-English-Tamil multilingual repertoires would garner even greater socioeconomic prestige than the monolingual or bilingual repertoires of first generation Tamil immigrants. Given this unwelcome reversal in socioeconomic rank, some first generation Tamil elites deploy nativist ideologies of linguistic purism instead to highlight their moral status as custodians of an ancient or pure tradition. Similarly, monolingual or bilingual elites in Quebec deploy nativist ideologies of linguistic purism to emphasize their moral stature as modernized citizens and leaders of an authenticated Quebec nation.

The institutional sites that comprise the Montreal Tamil diasporas are a particularly revealing vantage point from which to investigate how competing interlocutors strategically align signs of social status, processes of local emplacement, and ideologies of linguistic purism to scales of social belonging. First, the geographic and historical dimensions of emplacement are unique in diaspora contexts. In contrast to nations, diasporas emerge from decentered yet structured sociopolitical processes that produce durable semiotic configurations of different material types (Blommaert, et al. 2005; Ho 2006). Second, these decentered processes enable interlocutors to navigate more freely between hierarchically-scaled spaces and temporalized modes of interaction, a mobility that is further facilitated by the globalizing flows of Montreal's cityscape. In this article, I chronicle how the linguistic practices and discursive performances of different generations and sub-groups of interlocutors in Montreal's Tamil diasporas are "reformatting", or reconfiguring, competing ideologies of linguistic purism. By standardizing or transforming the spatiotemporal boundaries between linguistic form, interlocutor, and context, these discursive acts are contributing to unexpected convergences and divergences in linguistic practice and ideology within Montreal.

Previous research in linguistic anthropology suggests that the reformatting of contrasting ideological regimes requires a particular temporal and spatial scale for its resolution (Blommaert, et al. 2005; Eisenlohr 2004; Fader 2007; Meek 2007; Wortham

2005). My analysis contributes to this existing body of research by explicitly mapping the historical and geographical scales through which ideologies of linguistic purism are altered in encounters among and between Indian Tamil, Sri Lankan Tamil, and Québécois de souche social sub-groups.<sup>5</sup> This process of ideological reformatting is propelled by crucial moments of sociopolitical regimentation that interdiscursively suture together spatiotemporally-disparate semiotic genealogies (i.e., chains of signification) (see Agha 2005a; Irvine 2005). This article's analysis of "inter-event semiosis" thus heeds the disciplinary call to "locate traditional models for thinking about discourse within larger sociohistorical frameworks" (Agha 2005a:1,5).

### Setting and Scaling the Diaspora Stage

The spatiotemporal trajectory of this article's narrative begins in late-colonial South Asia and ultimately unfolds in present-day Montreal, describing along the way various social and political acts that format the semiotic interpretation of Tamil and French spatiotemporal indexicalities. During this process, competing narratives of "primordiality"—which invokes a historicity of causal degeneration—and of "modernity"—which invokes a historicity of causal progress—emerge to espouse alternative criteria for moral or political engagement among status-seeking interlocutors. In some circumstances, the encounter between morally or politically-opposed interlocutors actually succeeds in unbinding hegemonic space-time, allowing novel ideologies or counter-ideologies of linguistic purism to be expressed while temporarily inverting status relations between interlocutors.<sup>6</sup>

In early to mid-20th century Tamil Nadu, Jaffna, and Quebec, growing segments of all three regional populations converged in their endorsement of an elitist ideology of linguistic purism. First, elite nationalist leaders developed standard languages from a prestigious linguistic style believed to possess "pure", (i.e., unchanging), textual, and literary qualities. Second, other linguistic styles were depicted as vernaculars corrupted by "foreign" or non-desirable languages. Under these nationalist regimes, speakers of the "pure" linguistic standard rose in status and speakers of "impure" or "non-native" linguistic styles declined in status. For example, upper-caste non-Brahmin speakers of the central Madurai Tamil register, upper-caste non-Brahmin speakers of the Jaffna Tamil register, and upper-class Québécois de souche speakers of a Europeanized French register eventually emerged as ratified, iconic signifiers of Tamil or Québécois nationhood. These semiotic interpretations both entailed and authorized the representation of Tamil Nadu, Tamil Eelam, and Quebec as self-evident, timeless, and geographically-bounded nations.

After acquiring varying degrees of political autonomy in the mid- to late-20th century, each society began to differ in its discursive representation of linguistic purism and prestige. In late 20th to early 21st century Tamil Nadu, post-nationalist leaders have begun highlighting the socioeconomic prestige of the evolving Indian Tamil vernacular. This discourse spatiotemporally frames the "hybridizing" languages spoken by urban Tamils, Brahmin Tamils, and even Tamil youth as iconically signifying a globalizing, modernizing, and pluralistic civil society. In late 20th to early 21st century Sri Lanka, however, Tamil Eelam separatists continue to promote an ideology of linguistic purism which emphasizes the cultural prestige of Jaffna's (presumably) unchanging literary language. This discourse spatiotemporally frames the people, territory, and language of Jaffna as iconic signifiers of a primordial and purist Tamil culture. In late 20th to early 21st century Quebec, nationalist leaders have endorsed an ideology of linguistic purism which emphasizes both the international prestige and indigenous authenticity of Québécois French. This discourse spatiotemporally frames its elite Québécois de souche speakers as iconic signifiers of Quebec's political modernity and cultural and linguistic distinctiveness.

Migratory exchanges between Tamil populations in South India and Sri Lanka and from South Asia to Canada during the late colonial and post-colonial periods have helped to transform these nascent ideological differences into institutionalized eth-

nonational divergences. In a reversal of 19th and 20th century migratory patterns between colonial southern Asia and southeastern Asia, where higher-caste and upper-class Chettiar Sri Lankan Tamil merchants or Vellālar Sri Lankan Tamil landlords strategically segregated themselves from lower-caste and lower-class Indian Tamil indentured laborers (Daniel 1996; Lee and Rajoo 1987), the contemporary migration of Tamils to Montreal and other Euro-American countries has resulted in the strategic segregation of upper-class and higher-caste Brahmin Indian Tamil immigrants from lower-caste and lower-class Sri Lankan Tamil refugees. I examine how this segregation has fostered tacit competitions between community leaders of Indian Tamil and Sri Lankan Tamil social sub-groups, both of which are attempting to standardize their notion of linguistic purity and prestige through the Tamil language education of second generation youth. I also consider how Québécois de souche citizens are coping with an impending loss of iconic status vis-à-vis the manifest presence of other minority French-speakers, such as French-speaking Tamil-Québécois youth, within a rapidly diversifying francophone nation.

In this high stakes setting of linguistic contact, minute transformations in linguistic practice and ideology herald significant consequences for people's experiences of social belonging. Many first generation Tamils and elite Québécois de souche have adopted a strategy of "divergence" in order to ideologically de-emphasize linguistic commonalities and underscore ethnonational status, and linguistic distinctions between sub-groups (see Bourdieu 1984). Yet among second generation youth of Indian Tamil or Sri Lankan Tamil ancestry, there has been an unexpected "convergence" in linguistic practice in spite of the enforced segregation and ideological differentiation of both Tamil sub-groups. While differing in their rationale for mixing languages, both Indian Tamil-Québécois and Sri Lankan Tamil-Québécois youth employ similarly hybridizing "Montreal Tamil" linguistic styles. These cosmopolitan linguistic styles help to integrate Montreal as a distinct *ūr* (home town) within a transnational Tamil sphere, and further distinguish this globalizing city from the "distinct society" of Quebec.

### Converging Ideologies of Linguistic Purism

The ethnological comparison of nationalist societies such as Tamil Nadu, Jaffna, and Quebec reveals common strategies for the regimentation of "pure", "native," and "high-status" linguistic forms, practices, and interlocutors. In each society, policies of linguistic purism are linked to the public ratification of segregated and hierarchically-ranked sociolinguistic domains. For example in South Asia, colonial and nationalist policies of sociolinguistic purification and philological classification have enabled the diglossic division of Tamil into easily identifiable high and low registers and their respective designation as "pure" and "corrupt" styles (Britto 1986; Trautmann 2006). In Quebec, the existence of separate monolingual institutional domains has indirectly facilitated the hierarchical classification of French and English speakers and languages. Despite lacking an explicit metapragmatic descriptor for these sociolinguistic hierarchies, a diglossic-type consciousness nevertheless prevails among many Québécois.

By definition, the term *diglossia* posits the existence of opposed yet related linguistic systems that can be ranked as high and low, formal or informal, literary or vernacular, etc. (Ferguson 1959, 1987, 1991; Fishman 1965). This structuralist concept has been institutionally sanctioned by the regional governments and leaders of Tamil Nadu and Jaffna. Britto's (1986) analysis of Tamil diglossia suggests that *cēn tamīl* (pure) and *koṭuntamīl* (crooked or corrupt) oppositions are mapped onto different genres of *elutu tamīl* (written Tamil), *mētaitamīl* (staged Tamil), and *pēccu tamīl* (vernacular Tamil), or onto different periodized styles of classical Tamil (circa 500 B.C.E. to C.E. 500), literary Tamil (circa C.E. 600 to C.E. 1700), and modern Tamil (circa C.E. 1800 to present). Nationalist movements in both Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka have exploited these linguistic distinctions to construct moral narratives of nationhood.

In Sri Lanka, early 20th century Tamil nationalist leaders assembled a prototype of the Sri Lankan Tamil standard by combining stylistic elements from the poetic genre of classical Tamil with grammatical elements from the vernacular language of Jaffna Tamil elites (Kalainathan 2000; Kandiah 1978; Rajan 1995). This standardization effort prompted the formation of a coeval chronotope (Bakhtin 1981; Silverstein 2005) linking together the region, people, and languages of pre-historic Indian Tamilagam (circa 300 B.C.E. to C.E. 300), the pre-colonial Jaffna kingdom (circa 13th–17th centuries), the contemporary Jaffna peninsula, and the projected Tamil Eelam state. In response to Sinhalese accusations that Tamils are descendants of foreign Damila invaders of ancient Lanka, Tamil nationalists have since revised this chronotopic representation to instead assert that the primordial homeland of Sri Lankan Tamils is located in ancient Jaffna rather than ancient Indian Tamilagam. These revisionist historiographies also depict the people of Jaffna as timelessly resisting the foreign infiltration of their territory, culture, and language by Indo-Aryan (i.e., Sinhalese) and other Indo-Dravidian invaders.<sup>7</sup> Consequently, the linguistic style spoken by Jaffna inhabitants is popularly believed to be an unchanging, literary-like language with purist and classical roots.

Contemporary power struggles between the pro-Sinhalese state and LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) separatists similarly rely upon strategies that assert or contest claims of indigeneity. The government of Sri Lanka has routinely demanded evidence of native ancestry as a prerequisite for granting constitutional rights to ethnic minorities.<sup>8</sup> In the aftermath of Sri Lanka's colonial independence, many formerly high-status yet minority Sri Lankan Tamils were excluded from equitable participation in public institutions when Sinhalese-Buddhist nationalists legalized their populist claims for majoritarian rule. Subsequent constitutional attempts to transform Sri Lanka into a purely Sinhalese-Buddhist nation have been paralleled by the LTTE's military efforts to demarcate the northeastern region of Sri Lanka as a purely Tamil nation. Within this bounded, sovereign territory of Tamil Eelam, the people of Jaffna would once again inherit their mantle as custodians of a classical, or primordial, Sri Lankan Tamil territory, culture, and language.<sup>9</sup>

Similar nativist discourses were deployed during the Dravidianist nationalist movement in pre-independence Tamil Nadu. In this context, arguments of Dravidian indigeneity were used to question the "native" authenticity of high-status Brahmin Tamils, whose religion, language, and racial stock were described as having a foreign, Indo-Aryan genealogy. In contrast, nationalist leaders designated the linguistic style spoken by non-Brahmin, high-caste elites in Madurai as being purely Dravidian in origin and most appropriate for use as the national standard. In South India there exists a long literary tradition describing Madurai Tamil as having retained the core, or purest, properties of classical Tamil.<sup>10</sup> Other Tamil linguistic styles, especially those spoken by Brahmins and large city dwellers, are collectively referred to as crooked Tamil. These modern vernaculars are popularly believed to have been phonologically and lexically degraded by contact with foreign Indo-European languages—in particular Sanskrit and English (Annamalai 1979; Britto 1986; Ramaswamy 1997; Schiffman 1973).

The escalation of anti-Brahmin sentiment in pre-independence and early post-independence Tamil Nadu prompted many Brahmin Tamils to emigrate to other Indian provinces and diasporic nations during this time period (Manor 2001; Sivathamby 1995; Weiner 2001). After Tamil Nadu became a linguistic province in 1956, however, this Dravidianist regime began to wane in authority (Sarkar 2001). Many Tamil Nadu politicians, scholars, artists, and activists now promote a new type of linguistic standard (Schiffman 1998). Rather than insisting on purist or literary linguistic criteria, these actors strategically mix both literary and non-literary styles of Tamil and English in their discursive performances of a modern Tamil vernacular (Nakassis and Dean 2007). Such recent attempts to "vernacularize" Tamil Nadu have marked its multilingual, urban, and upper-class speakers as the newly ratified iconic signifiers of the society's globalizing modernity (Annamalai 1978; Kachru 1998).

Under this nascent modernization regime, Brahmin Tamil speech is reinterpreted as both a prestigious and native Dravidian language.

The development of a French standard in Quebec was similarly accomplished by differentiating between pure and corrupt linguistic styles and racial stocks. In the initial phase of Quebec's linguistic nationalist movement (from the 1950s to 1970s), radical intellectuals endorsed the language of the working class and peasantry—also known as *Québécois joul*—for being the most authentic, indigenous voice of the Quebec nation (Beaulieu 1984; Handler 1988; Morin 1960; Vallières 1968). In the second phase of Quebec's linguistic nationalist movement (from the 1980s to the present), a small group of *Québécois de souche* elites challenged the purity of *Québécois joul* by depicting it as a non-literary language corrupted by English (Handler 1988; Maillot 2000). These French-educated elite instead sanctioned the use of their own French vernacular as the national standard.<sup>11</sup> The purity and prestige of this language—commonly referred to as *Québécois French* or simply *French*—is based on its syntactic resemblance to literary or European French, whereas its indigenous authenticity is conveyed by a distinctively Canadian phonology and lexicon (Cox 1998; Jobin 1987; Lesage 1991; Levine 1990; Mougeon and Beniak 1994; Papen 1998). *Québécois French*, after it was established as the national standard of Quebec, transformed its elite speakers into iconic signifiers of Quebec's political modernity and linguistic purity.

The recent conversion of religious institutional domains (i.e., Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish schools, hospitals, etc.) into monolingual institutional domains (i.e., French and English schools, hospitals, etc.) has further entrenched this purist regime within contemporary Quebec. The idea of segregated monolingual domains was originally conceived by bilingual nationalist leaders as a means to provide the *Québécois de souche* with an autonomous socioeconomic sphere of influence within the sectors of health, education, public works, and finance. As intended, some bilingual *Québécois de souche* were able to seize control of several important industries from English-speaking capitalists. These newfound *Québécois de souche* elite joined the ranks of a bilingual vanguard which enforced standards of monolingual purity and French language revitalization, but not socioeconomic equity, upon the rest of the population (Handler 1988; Lemco 1992). As a result, many lower-status monolingual *Québécois de souche* have been unable to develop the multilingual or even bilingual repertoires necessary to compete for social mobility within the globalizing city of Montreal.

By referring to Montreal as a globalizing city rather than as a bilingual or multicultural city, I underline the multiple scales of belonging at play in contemporary Montreal. Currently in Montreal there exist several vernacular styles of French, not including *Québécois French* and *Québécois joul*, that are popularly perceived as non-native languages. In the 1970s, the Quebec government's receptive attitude toward French-speaking immigrants introduced a multitude of international French styles, including European, African, Middle Eastern, Caribbean, and Canadian French regional registers, into the city (Béland 1999). Consequently, the dominant ethnolinguistic classification schema of Quebec, in which francophones are neatly differentiated from anglophones and allophones (i.e., immigrants), is now obsolete due to residents' overlapping multilingual repertoires. At the same time, encounters between different French-speaking interlocutors have heightened residents' metapragmatic awareness of French stylistic contrasts and their alignment with native or non-native ethnic identities (Helly 1996, 2001; Papen 1998; Tousignant 1987). These contrasting trends, one of disintegrating categories of ethnolinguistic differentiation and the second of heightened metalinguistic acuity, encapsulate the current tenor of Montreal's language politics.

As a result, the recent rise of nativist discourses in *Québécois* politics indexes the voting public's growing desire to ethnolinguistically differentiate between *Québécois de souche* and other French interlocutors.<sup>12</sup> Quebec's image as a distinct society composed of French-speaking North Americans has lost its racial, ethnic, and cultural

distinctiveness in the nationalist movement's singular pursuit of a French linguistic identity. This fact is particularly troublesome for the Québécois de souche elite, whose iconic status depends upon the public's ongoing ratification of their linguistic (and ethnoracial) qualities as pure and prestigious. Through the semiotic process known as fractal recursivity, the *de jure* segregation of French-medium and English-medium domains has become a template for the *de facto* social and residential segregation of French-speaking subgroups (Irvine and Gal 2000). In a rapidly globalizing city where immigrant French styles are judged as "purer" and immigrant multilingual repertoires as more prestigious, these strategies of ethnolinguistic segregation remain a vital component of nationalists' efforts to preserve existing structures of social stratification.

### Ethnonational Segregation of Indian Tamils and Sri Lankan Tamils

Strategies of ethnolinguistic segregation are similarly utilized to manage status relations among minority groups, including those belonging to the Montreal Tamil diasporas. According to the foundational principles of Canadian multiculturalism, provincial governments must financially assist ethnic minorities in establishing their own cultural and linguistic institutions (Ujimoto 1980). Yet because an ethnolinguistic ideology of social classification has informed Québécois policy since the 1970s, many sources of funding in Quebec are preferentially given to ethnolinguistically rather than ethnonationally-defined groups (Helly 1996, 2001; Taddeo and Taras 1987).<sup>13</sup> Thus, any two minority groups with similar ethnolinguistic ascriptions are faced with a strategic decision: (1) to emphasize their ethnonational identity and maintain internal status distinctions, yet lose government funds, or (2) to emphasize their ethnolinguistic identity and minimize internal status distinctions, yet receive government funds.

Among those who ascribe to the ethnolinguistic identity of "Tamil" are a smaller population of Indian Tamils (~3,000) and a larger population of Sri Lankan Tamils (~30,000) (Canada 2001; Canada 1991b). The first wave of Tamil migration to Montreal commenced in the 1960s and introduced many Brahmin Indian Tamil professionals to the region (Canada 1991b). When Indian Tamil migration began to taper off in the 1980s, the immigration of middle- and lower-caste Sri Lankan Tamil refugees from Jaffna mushroomed. By virtue of their commonly-spoken Tamil language, both Sri Lankan Tamils and Indian Tamils were perceived as a single ethnolinguistic population, or *les tamouls* (Tamils), by other Québécois. According to this perspective, even the demarcated waves of first Indian Tamil and then Sri Lankan Tamil immigration appear as one seamless stream of Tamil migration. Furthermore, because Sri Lankan Tamils greatly outnumber Indian Tamils in Montreal, the local media assumes that Sri Lankans are the normative Tamil type and interchangeably uses the terms "tamouls" and "Sri Lankais" (Sri Lankans). Due to salient differences in their political ideologies, socioeconomic status, and religious practices, Montreal Tamils instead choose to publically emphasize their divergent ethnonational identities as Sri Lankans and Indians.

After their initial arrival into eastern Canada in 1983, Sri Lankan Tamil refugees were branded as illegal "boat people" by the Canadian media (Colpron 1988; Regan 1992). Twenty years later, much media coverage continues to promote racialized stereotypes of Tamil refugees through allegations of their endemic violence, poverty, and terrorist-like behavior (Cauchy 2003; Côte 2004; Daily 1995; Laroche 1997; Pelchat 1991; Tasso 1986, 1987, 2004). This mediated racialization of Tamil identity has been similarly noted in other countries, such as Britain, which also possess sizeable Sri Lankan Tamil diasporas (Daniel 1996). In Montreal, Tamil activists have attempted to counteract these stereotypes by educating Québécois and Canadian publics about the politics of Sri Lanka's civil war (Première 2006). These public broadcast programs have succeeded in garnering some sympathy for the Tamil Eelam movement, especially among pro-nationalist or pro-separatist segments of the Québécois population.

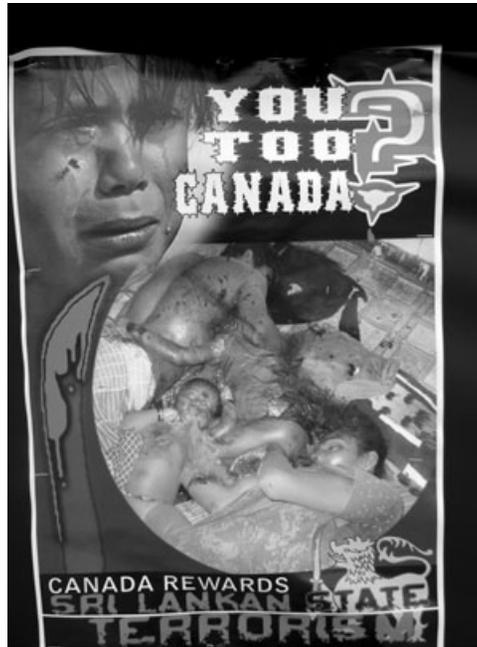
Unfortunately, these intercultural dialogues were discontinued after April 10, 2006 when newly elected Conservative Prime Minister Stephen Harper officially declared that the LTTE and the World Tamil Association (WTA) were terrorist organizations (Canadian Broadcasting 2006a).<sup>14</sup> Two days later, the Canadian police raided the WTA office in Côte-des-Neiges, Montreal to collect lists of local fundraisers and sponsors (Canadian Broadcasting 2006b; Canadian Television 2006). In the media's coverage of this event, Sri Lankan Tamil residents faced possible prison sentences if their names were found to be affiliated with either organization. Fear of criminal persecution and outrage at police harassment has since unified this vast and heterogeneous diaspora to respond with a concerted "ethnonational" voice of protest. On July 25, 2006 in memorial of the original anti-Tamil Colombo pogrom on "Black July" 23, 1983, a few hundred Sri Lankan Tamils gathered at a public square in Parc-Extension, Montreal to peacefully protest the prime minister's censuring of the LTTE. Similar demonstrations had been previously organized by Sri Lankan Tamil diasporas in Europe and Australia in critique of their host governments' anti-LTTE policy (Tamilnet 2007; Whiteman 2006).

This public demonstration, in addition to critiquing the *text* of Canadian federal policy and the *subtext* of Québécois stereotypes, attempted to reframe the spatiotemporal *context* of the Sri Lankan civil war as an ongoing ethnic conflict that was also transpiring in Montreal. Through the use of visual and discursive tactics, protestors portrayed the ethnic conflict as a human rights violation first perpetrated by the pro-Sinhalese Sri Lankan government and later by the Conservative Canadian government.<sup>15</sup> The plastering of vivid images of massacred and mutilated women and children, the dramatic staging of the original pogrom experience, and the visible picketing against Canadian foreign policy all functioned as contextualization cues pointing toward a spatiotemporal chain of causally-linked events—(1) 1983 pogrom in Colombo, (2) the 1990s battles in Jaffna, (3) the (then) current conflict in Batticaloa, and (4) Harper's 2006 decree in Montreal (see Figures 1, 2, 3). These chronotopic performances were also intended to emotively transport Tamil expatriates and second generation youth, many of whom had become politically detached from events in Sri Lanka, back to the forefront of war.

Despite an initial show of sympathy for the political plight of these refugees, many Indian Tamils in Montreal have shunned Sri Lankan Tamils to avoid being similarly racialized as "thugs," "terrorists," or "boat people." One first generation Indian Tamil



**Figure 1**  
Black July memorial at Parc-Extension, Montreal on July 25, 2006: Images of massacred women and children from the Sri Lankan war.



**Figure 2**  
Black July memorial at Parc-Extension, Montreal on July 25, 2006: Poster critiquing Canadian foreign policy in Sri Lanka.

informed me that she intentionally does not interact with Sri Lankan Tamils or attend WTA fundraising events in Montreal.<sup>16</sup> Being of the age to remember Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's assassination by a (presumably) LTTE suicide bomber in Chennai in 1991, she remains deeply suspicious of the LTTE's presence in Montreal and would rather identify with Indian not Tamil patriotism. Yet according to the perspective of most Sri Lankan Tamils, the ethnonational segregation of Montreal Tamils is caused



**Figure 3**  
Black July memorial at Parc-Extension, Montreal on July 25, 2006: Skit portraying the original pogrom experience.

by socioeconomic disparities, not differences in political ideology. Many Indian Tamils are highly educated scientists and engineers who are fluent in English and who live in upper-middle class, suburban homes south of Montreal. In contrast, many Sri Lankan Tamil refugees are less fluent in English, possess fewer educational credentials, and reside in lower middle-class apartments and houses within Montreal's ethnically-mixed neighborhoods.<sup>17</sup> There, many work as factory laborers, service industry workers, small-scale entrepreneurs, and Tamil language teachers.

Religious differences between Indian Tamils and Sri Lankan Tamils are also cited as a reason for their ethnonational segregation. Montreal's Indian Tamil diaspora is primarily composed of Brahmin Hindus belonging to either Saiva or Vaishnava sects. Despite these sectarian differences most Indian Tamils worship together at the local Hindu Mandir, an Indo-Canadian temple that caters to a mixture of Vaishnava and Saiva ritual styles. The Indian Tamil organization of Tamilagam also organizes separate events for the celebration of Tamil-specific holidays, such as Deepavali or Pongal. Sri Lankan Tamils, who are ~66% Saiva Hindu and ~27% Roman Catholic (Canada 1991a), worship in their own churches and temples. Currently in Montreal, there is one Roman Catholic Sri Lankan Tamil mission (Our Lady of Deliverance) and there are three Sri Lankan Tamil Saiva temples (Thiru Murugan temple, Sri Durgai Amman temple, and Ganesha temple) which have been constructed according to ritually prescribed standards.<sup>18</sup> In a reversal of customary caste relations, lower caste Sri Lankan Tamils, not higher caste Indian Tamils, are enforcing standards of Tamil ritual purity within Montreal.

Both Indian Tamils and Sri Lankan Tamils nevertheless maintain the integrity of their Tamil *ja-ti* (local caste) status by participating in segregated religious institutions. Most Brahmin Indian Tamil Saivites prefer to worship at mixed caste, pan-Indian Hindu temples rather than interact with middle- or lower-caste Tamils at a Sri Lankan Tamil Saiva temple. Prescriptions of caste purity are even more strictly adhered to by Sri Lankan Tamils, many of whom worship in caste-specific temples and churches. For example, some middle-caste Sri Lankan Tamil Catholics would rather attend mass at St. Andrew's church in Montreal, a church predominated by Filipino minorities, than attend Tamil-language mass with lower-caste Tamils at Our Lady of Deliverance. In nearby metropolitan Toronto, where Indian Tamil and Sri Lankan Tamil diasporas are much more populous, standards of caste and ritual purity appear to be less universally stringent. The Ganesh temple in Toronto is a congregational-style Tamil temple where people of both Vaishnavite and Saivite sects and both Indian and Sri Lankan nationalities regularly worship and interact (Coward 2000).

The greater emphasis on Tamil ethnolinguistic identity in Toronto's Ganesh temple and on Indian or Sri Lankan ethnonational identity in Montreal's churches and temples points to an important difference in the ideological regimentation of these Canadian cities. In a city where language is not political, (e.g., Toronto), the public recognition of Tamil linguistic commonalities is less meaningful for marking social identity. However, in a city where language is political, (e.g., Montreal), the public recognition of Tamil linguistic commonalities is overly meaningful for marking social identity. The ethnonational divergence of Tamil sub-groups in Montreal thus represents a heterodox movement that works against the grain of Quebec's dominant language ideology in its pursuit of diasporic interests. It is only through their heightened insight into the metapragmatics of ethnolinguistic classification that Indian Tamil and Sri Lankan Tamil sub-groups are able to institutionally de-emphasize their ethnolinguistic commonalities and strategically emphasize their ethnonational differences.

Sri Lankan Tamils, in being recognized as the normative ethnolinguistic Tamil type of Quebec, have successfully secured government funds to build a vast institutional complex of temples and churches, community centers, and small businesses in neighborhoods internationally referred to as "Little Jaffna." Included in this complex are at least ten Sri Lankan Tamil language schools where second generation youth study literary Tamil. Despite this institutional success, community leaders still struggle to

refute their mediated caricature as violent terrorists while simultaneously attempting to ensure the diaspora's continued sponsorship of the Tamil Eelam movement. As an alternative strategy, Indian Tamils have abdicated government funds in favor of integrating within the institutional complex of the Indian diaspora. Consequently there are no Indian Tamil language schools for second generation youth, who instead learn to speak vernacular Tamil at home. This diglossic compartmentalization of second generation linguistic repertoires, such that Sri Lankan Tamil youth acquire literary Tamil competence, and Indian Tamil youth acquire only vernacular Tamil competence, seeks to preserve the purity of literary Tamil while maintaining ethno-linguistic status distinctions between Tamil subgroups in the diaspora.

The language socialization of second generation Indian Tamil-Québécois and Sri Lankan Tamil-Québécois youth differs not only in institutional settings but also in prescriptive norms of linguistic purity. In general, Sri Lankan Tamil leaders endorse a classicalist or primordialist ideology to suggest that "the antiquity (*tonmai*) and primordality (*munmai*) of Tamil, as well as its uniqueness (*tanimai*) and purity (*tūymai*)" are qualisigns<sup>19</sup> of its speakers' superior morality (Ramaswamy 1997:39). Among the adherents of neo-Saivism, the purported primordality, egalitarianism, and rationality of this devotional religion are believed to surpass both Brahmanical Hinduism and European secular philosophy. In contrast, Brahmin Indian Tamil leaders espouse a modernist narrative (Keane 2007) which asserts that moral progress and cultural (and linguistic) evolution are inextricably tied. In denying a necessary iconic link between cultural or linguistic purity and moral excellence, Indian Tamils legitimate their hybridizing cultural and linguistic practices while maintaining a reputation as Tamil patriots.

Both of these temporalized and spatialized narratives presuppose the existence of divergent scales of belonging among Montreal Tamils. During my fieldwork, I often heard different versions of the following language ideology articulated by my Tamil informants: Indian Tamils speak a vernacular, modern style of Tamil, and Sri Lankan Tamils speak a classical, literary style of Tamil. This language ideology indexes a "modernist" and "primordialist" divide between Tamil sub-groups—a discursive representation that is institutionally reinforced by the divergent language socialization of second generation Sri Lankan Tamil and Indian Tamil youth. In the following sections, I examine two institutional settings in which Tamil regional registers and speakers are performatively or discursively depicted as spatiotemporally distinct. My analysis relies upon Agha's (2005b) concept of "enregisterment" to suggest that the guided interpretation of contrasting (en)textualized voices within chunks of discourse creatively entails motivated iconic and indexical linkages between linguistic type, social persona, and spatial or temporal structures.

### Temporalizing Sri Lankan Tamil as a Literary Language

Every Sunday at the Thiru Murugan temple in Dollard-des-Ormeaux, about 70 second generation Sri Lankan Tamil-Québécois children and youth between the ages of four and eighteen attend Tamil language school. There they are instructed to speak, read, and write a purist and literary style of Sri Lankan Tamil. In the pre-class assembly of one Sunday session, I audio-recorded a performance in which an elderly school principal directs her students in prayer, song, and moral exegesis. During this discourse event, the principal aligns signs of linguistic purity and primordialism to distinctions in the categorization of elder versus youth expertise, textual versus oral media, literary versus vernacular morphemes, and religious versus secular morality. These alignments fabricate an interpretative cultural framework (Irvine 2005) through which Sri Lankan Tamil is temporalized as an ancient, purist, and religiously moral literary language.

In the first segment of this performance, the principal (P) assists her students (S) in reciting a prayer in classical Tamil from the eighth century text, *Tiruvacakam*. In the

**Table 1**  
**Temporal structure of narrative performance**

	From classical to modern styles	From textual to oral genres	From medieval to contemporary themes
1 <sup>st</sup> segment	classical style	textual genre	eighth century devotional text
2 <sup>nd</sup> segment	literary style	textual and oral genres	temple school song about preserving Tamil culture and arts
3 <sup>rd</sup> segment	modern style	oral genre	medieval secular fable, then colonial secular fable, then contemporary moral lesson

second segment, everyone collectively sings a school song in literary Tamil. Finally in the third segment, the principal narrates two well-known Tamil fables in literary Tamil. The first fable takes place in a generic medieval Tamil kingdom and the second fable takes place in a colonial Sri Lankan town visited by Mohandas Gandhi. At the end of each narration, the principal code-switches to a vernacular style of modern Sri Lankan Tamil when commenting on the fable's moral lesson. Thus, through the opening alignment of classical, textual, and medieval voices and the closing alignment of modern, oral, and contemporary voices, the temporal structure of this entire discourse event is seen as moving from classical to modern styles, textual to oral genres, and medieval to contemporary themes (see Table 1).

The initial turn sequence of the first discourse segment establishes a hierarchical model for interpreting this temporal structure as a degeneration of semiotic form. When the principal recites a line of the opening prayer and students imitate each phrase, they create an inter-generational footing that authorizes the elderly principal's role as expert instructor and the youth's role as novice students. Students contextually align themselves to this social hierarchy by standing in stationary rows of increasing height and age facing the principal. Taller, older, more advanced students are presumed to possess a more extensive knowledge of literary and classical Tamil than shorter, younger, less advanced students. The principal, who often circulates around the student assembly to monitor individual behavior, diagrams her second order metalinguistic knowledge (Silverstein 2003) of the Tamil language. In contrast, her circumscribed students are depicted as possessing only a first order indexical knowledge of a Sri Lankan Tamil vernacular spoken in Montreal.

Other co(n)textual elements are incorporated into this representational economy (Keane 2003) to suggest that "older" semiotic forms (i.e., texts, speakers, genres) are more expert-like than "newer" semiotic forms. The marking of "old" and "new" types relies upon the didactic interpretation of indexical links between material form and historical period. For example, the temporal period of the opening prayer could be interpreted as "new" due to its modern-day oral animation or as "old" due to its pre-modern textual authorship. This uncertainty is partly resolved through the narrative's temporal framework, where written genres are seen as historically antecedent to oral genres. The principal reinforces this interpretation by code-switching from a literary Tamil style when narrating the text (thus embodying a textual "primary source") to a vernacular style when metadiscursively commenting on its content (thus embodying an oral "secondary source"). Collectively, these devices imply that the prayer's primary or primordial context is anchored in the classical period, and its secondary or degenerative context is anchored in the modern period.

Closer analysis of these narrative acts of code-switching reveals a motivated iconic link between qualisigns of purity and moral excellence and the formal properties of

literary Tamil morphemes. In the third segment, the principal transitions in mid-sentence from the literary style (in capital letters) used to narrate the first fable to the modern vernacular style (in bold letters) used to emphasize the moral necessity (*-num*) of proper social behavior:

P: ELLĀRUM NALLAVARKALĀyitanum P: we must act in a way that  
NANMAIYĒseyyōnum. . . . benefits everyone

In this example, the principal's use of the recognizable Sri Lankan Tamil morpheme *ōnum* rather than the literary morpheme *anum* signals a temporal shift in periodization from a pre-modern literary style to a modern vernacular style. Her ease in transitioning from literary to vernacular Tamil mid-word also creates the impression of a close evolutionary affinity between pre-modern Tamil morphemes and modern Sri Lankan Tamil morphemes. By virtue of its absence, the corresponding Indian Tamil morpheme *anū* (whose nasal phoneme is replaced by a nasalized vowel) is interpreted as having a more distant, (i.e., degenerative) genealogical relationship to its literary progenitor.

The moral themes of this primordialist narrative are further reinforced by iconically linking temporal indices of classical Tamil literature and Saiva devotionism. Although much of classical Tamil literature was originally secular in content (Britto 1986), this performance instead depicts classical Tamil as first evolving from the writings of Saiva religious scripture. The *Tirukkural*, which was written circa 200 B.C.E. to C.E. 500 and is comprised of secular poetry, is ubiquitously considered to be the masterpiece of classical Sangam literature. At the opening of Tamil schools in southern Asia, students are often expected to recite couplets from the *Tirukkural* as a directive for proper moral behavior. In this case however, the principal directs students to recite the school's opening prayer from the eighth century devotional Saiva text, *Tiruvacakam*. This decision signifies her attempt to assert the primordial influence of Saiva religious morality rather than secular ethics on the development of classical Tamil literature and ancient Tamil culture. By extension, her choice of this devotional text favorably distinguishes Sri Lankan Tamil Saiva religious morality from both Indian Brahminical Hinduism and Québécois secularism.

The performers' increasing use of Sri Lankan Tamil deictic markers by the second and third segments indexes the gradual emergence of a "purified" Sri Lankan Tamil register from the foundational literary style. As a general rule, literary Tamil utilizes both exclusive (*nāṅgal* and *eṅgal*) and inclusive (*nām* and *nama*) first person plural pronouns, whereas vernacular Sri Lankan Tamil utilizes only exclusive first person plural pronouns. In the following excerpt of the school song, even though students are singing in literary Tamil, they preferentially employ exclusive first person plural pronouns (in italics) over inclusive first person plural pronouns (in bold):

<p>S: paṅbāri kalaikal tamil pēnal pāṅguraṅ māṅam <b>nām</b> uḷaippōm serṅdiram ellām tamil vaḷarkkum <i>eṅgal</i> siriya paṅbinai kāttiruvōm vāliya vāliya vāliyavē <i>eṅgal</i> kalaikalin kalvi kalakamadu</p>	<p>S: by nurturing Tamil culture, arts, language with honor we will toil everyone, joining together, Tamil will grow we will safeguard our excellent qualities prosper, prosper, prosper long! our arts education association (refrain)</p>
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This shifting between exclusive and inclusive pronouns is inconsistent with the unchanging deictic ground between speakers and addressees, all of whom are members of the same Sri Lankan Tamil temple. While perhaps this usage is nothing more than a grammatical glitch by speakers unaccustomed to using inclusive pronouns, it nonetheless signifies the burgeoning presence of an exclusively Sri Lankan Tamil voice within an otherwise literary text.

By the end of the third segment, the principal has completely transitioned into speaking the Sri Lankan Tamil vernacular by employing distinctly Sri Lankan Tamil morphemes (in bold), phonology (in italics), and lexicon. After narrating the fable of

Gandhi's visit to pre-Independence Sri Lanka in literary Tamil, the principal code-switches to modern Sri Lankan Tamil to emphasize its moral lesson:

P: adāvadu ũya seyalkale pārkkāde      P: therefore you should try not to do bad things  
kettade pēsāde—pēsapaṭādu. . .      or speak badly—don't speak badly

The literary-like phonetic articulation of the "r" in *pārkkāde* (rather than the Indian Tamil *pārkāte*) and the inclusion of the morpheme *paṭadu* (rather than the Indian Tamil *kūtādu*) in *pēsapaṭādu* confirms the regional specificity of this Tamil language and its speakers as Sri Lankan in origin.

Overall, the temporal flow of this performance iconically imitates the degenerative logic of historical causality endorsed by a moral narrative of primordialism. In seeking to diglossically differentiate between Sri Lankan Tamil and Indian Tamil vernaculars, this performance also seeks to authenticate the moral worth of an ancient Sri Lankan Tamil linguistic and cultural heritage. Mahalingam et al. write, "Asian Americans sometimes use the 'ancientness' of their culture to further legitimate their 'model minority' image" (2006:151–152). For the leaders of Montreal's Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora, the "oldness" and "purity" of their literary and religious heritage are signs of a primordial morality which legitimates their inclusion within Québécois and South Asian societies. Diaspora children and youth, who are seen as the sole inheritance of a dispersed Sri Lankan Tamil nation, are thus encouraged to study literary Tamil and to maintain its purity through their vernacular speech. These community leaders hope that the ancientness and purity of the Tamil language can be preserved until the homeland of Tamil Eelam is reclaimed. In the meantime, the diaspora's primordial religious morality is showcased in the effort to combat the negative stereotyping of Sri Lankan Tamils in Quebec.

### Mapping Indian Tamil as Vernacular Styles

The language socialization of Indian Tamil-Québécois youth relies upon discursive mapping techniques intended to represent the Indian Tamil language as a loose collection of modern vernacular styles. In this ideological context, the importance of speaking or teaching literary Tamil decreases in significance. In fact, Montreal's sole Indian Tamil language teacher, R. A. Krishnan, has devised an unconventional course syllabus and series of textbooks to teach vernacular Indian Tamil rather than literary Tamil, even adopting a Romanized script rather than the Tamil script to represent linguistic forms. In the introductory preface to his *Spoken Tamil Grammar Book*, Krishnan describes the diglossic peculiarities of Indian Tamil styles and provides a functionalist interpretation of their divergence from literary Tamil:

Another distinct special feature of Tamil is that the spoken language is quite different from the written one. This has come up because the written part, particularly the verb forms and case endings, is very complicated to use practically, especially when spoken in the rapid rate that day-to-day life requires. To solve this problem, different communities in various Tamil speaking regions have shortened it in their own way for ease of expression. As a result of this, the spoken language widely differs by both region and community. [Krishnan 2004:5]

Because, as he puts it, literary Tamil is "very complicated to use practically", morphological reduction enhances the vernacular's communicative function and democratic accessibility. In Krishnan's interpretative framework, diglossia is depicted as maladaptive, and linguistic change is envisioned as modernizing progress.

Krishnan also writes that he adopts as his textbook standard "the spoken language used by street shopkeepers in Chennai, the capital and the largest city of Tamil Nadu, India" (2004:5). Rather than describing Chennai Tamil as a corrupted language as it is widely perceived in most Tamil societies, this textbook explains the rules by which Chennai interlocutors mix Tamil and English to create the hybrid style of Tanglish. Brahmin Indian Tamils such as Krishnan share a long history of borrowing lexicon

and phonology from high-prestige Indo-European languages such as Sanskrit, Hindi, and English and, in general, they do not consider Chennai Tamil to be particularly corrupt (Annamalai 1978, 1989; Kachru 1998). In fact among upper-caste or upper-class Indian Tamils, linguistic expertise is indexed by a speaker's ability to appropriately code-mix or code-switch between different regional registers of Tamil or English. Similarly, Krishnan's linguistic expertise is less based on his academic qualifications than his familiarity with different regional or *ūr* styles of Tamil, including Kerala Tamil, Chennai Tamil, Coimbatore Tamil, Delhi Tamil, and Jaffna Tamil. He even develops textbook supplements for students interested in studying a specific *ūr* style of Tamil.

During the October 2005 Deepavali celebration in Montreal, Indian Tamil students and elders performed a self-authored drama in which the mythical god-heroes Ram and Sita tour the Tamil-speaking world while encountering interlocutors who speak different regional or *ūr* styles of Tamil (i.e., Jaffna Tamil, Singapore Tamil, Chennai Tamil, and Montreal Tamil). In its ideological affirmation of a moral narrative of modernity, this skit aligns the following signs: the transnational migration of Indian Tamil interlocutors, the development of newly hybridized local vernaculars, and the globalizing expansion and modernization of Tamil. When arriving in Canada, Ram and Sita encounter an Indian Tamil-Canadian boy who mixes Tamil and English and speaks with a Canadian accent. The audience laughs heartedly if not approvingly at this recognizable caricature of their own children's linguistic experimentation. The fact that both first and second generation actors from Montreal are able to imitate many different regional and *ūr* styles actually underscores their metapragmatic expertise in Tamil. Only Jaffna Tamil poses an exception, and a second generation Sri Lankan Tamil-Québécois actor was called in to speak this role. This casting anomaly attests to a prevalent belief among the Indian Tamil diaspora that Sri Lankan Tamils speak an inaccessible, literary language.

In the following excerpt, an upper-class, second generation Indian Tamil-Québécois couple, Lalitha and Mohan, expresses their belief that Sri Lankan Tamil and Indian Tamil are mutually unintelligible languages. When I asked if they would eventually send their children to the Tamil PELO (*Programme d'enseignement des langues d'origine*) school, they responded negatively:

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

The couple's decision to boycott schools attended by lower-income Sri Lankan Tamil-Québécois youth could be interpreted as having several long-term effects: (1) third generation children will have fewer opportunities to acquire Tamil literacy and (2) Indian Tamil and Sri Lankan Tamil vernaculars will continue to diverge along diglossic-like scales of linguistic purism or prestige. However, ethnographic evidence of Montreal Tamil youth's linguistic practices and attitudes partially contradict these predictions. In this last section, I describe and account for a gradual convergence in linguistic practice, if not ideology, among second generation youth of Indian Tamil and Sri Lankan Tamil ethnonational sub-groups.

### New Linguistic Convergences among Montreal Tamil Youth

Despite their segregation into different institutional and social networks, second generation Indian Tamil-Québécois youth and Sri Lankan Tamil-Québécois youth are currently converging in their efforts to create a hybridized *ūr* style of "Montreal Tamil." For their part, Indian Tamil-Québécois youth are following in their parents' tradition of hybridizing Indian Tamil with other high prestige languages. While there is some sense of novelty in mixing Tamil with French, these youth generally mix only Tamil and English. Québécois French is not perceived as a prestigious language by

Indian Tamil-Québécois youth who themselves are not always conversationally fluent in the language. Many parents' decisions to send their children to elite English-medium private schools have significantly influenced the composition of their linguistic repertoires, such that these youth possess greatest expertise in English, average expertise in literary French, lesser expertise in vernacular Tamil, even lesser expertise in vernacular French, and finally little to no expertise in literary Tamil.<sup>20</sup>

Ironically, most Sri Lankan Tamil-Québécois youth acquire greater expertise in all three French, English, and Tamil literary and vernacular languages than their Indian Tamil-Québécois counterparts, despite not being able to afford English-medium private schools. Their varied linguistic experiences at French-medium public schools, Sri Lankan Tamil language schools, and within the diaspora neighborhood have facilitated the development of these linguistic repertoires. Upon graduation from less prestigious schools, these multilingual children nevertheless possess an advantage in seeking employment in bilingual Montreal or even abroad. Their fluency in various styles of French, including Québécois French, Québécois joul, and European French, as well as English (which is learned in the neighborhood) enables them to pursue socioeconomic opportunities available only to fluently bilingual residents. Such opportunities have no doubt encouraged youth to take heed of their multilingual expertise and to experiment with its various constituents. Consequently, the mixing of Tamil, English, and French is often viewed as a sign of prestige among multiethnic youth who live in diaspora neighborhoods and who valorize their social position as among Montreal's most multilingual residents.

Yet as expressed in the opening vignette, many first generation Sri Lankan Tamil community leaders regard these acts of code-mixing or code-switching, particularly with French, as threatening the local status hierarchy and its underlying purist ideology. Even though many second generation youth attend Tamil language school to learn literary Tamil, they have not endorsed the purist or nationalist language ideology of these institutions. As succinctly expressed by one of Daniel's Sri Lankan Tamil informants in Britain, "I am told . . . that in Toronto and Montreal there are places called 'Little Jaffna.' That is enough of a Tamil nation for me. Wherever there are enough Tamils, there is a Tamil nation" (Daniel 1996:175–76). In the "Little Jaffna" neighborhoods of Côte-des-Neiges and Parc-Extension in Montreal, the only Tamil "nations" that most second generation youth have ever known, multilingual repertoires in Tamil, French, and English are pragmatically valued above monolingual expertise in literary Tamil. Aspirations of Tamil Eelam sovereignty, along with chronotopic representations of Jaffna's eternal linguistic and cultural purity, are quickly fading into memory within this multilingual space.

When I asked two Sri Lankan Tamil Roman Catholic youth, Ram and Mani, to describe how first generation adults in their church react to their code-mixing of Tamil, English, and French, they both grinned at each other and said, "They don't like it at all." Ram, who recently immigrated to Montreal from Jaffna two years earlier, is enrolled at a French-medium public school with Mani and is more fluent in French than in English. Ram and Mani's priest, Father Joseph, describes the relatively greater difficulty experienced by monolingual Sri Lankan Tamil adults in acquiring second-language competence in either French or English. Ram and Mani's act of speaking French within the Sri Lankan Tamil church reminds these adults of their inevitable loss of status both outside the Tamil institution and now increasingly within its sanctified walls. Despite these anxieties, parents are nonetheless obliged to rely upon youth to serve as multilingual translators during interactions with Québécois *de souche* and other Montreal residents. Such acts of translation temporarily invert their intergenerational "expert-novice" relationship and disproportionately elevate the social status and metalinguistic awareness of Sri Lankan Tamil-Québécois youth.

As suggested by Daniel, when empowered minorities use their awareness of the "blind spots at the centers of power" to "become catalysts of critical creativity," nationalist conventions of linguistic purity can be reformatted into habits reflecting diversifying and evolving diasporic subjectivities (2006:65). In the course of their

everyday routines, both second generation Indian Tamil and Sri Lankan Tamil youth often speak a hybridized form of Montreal Tamil, (i.e., Tamil mixed with an English and increasingly French lexicon). Although this linguistic style is not standardized in form or practice, its value lies in its ability to break elitist or purist norms in the pursuit of evolving social, economic, or political interests. The diasporic subjectivities of Montreal Tamil youth, given their historical genealogies, often transect multiple scales of belonging, and linguistic repertoires are molded to fit these experiences. For example, Mala, Selvamani's younger sister, has cultivated an international French persona by deliberately speaking in a Europeanized French register, socially interacting with French Arab and French African minorities, and being the first in her family to attend French-medium college. Krishnan's eldest son, who speaks English, French, Tamil, and Hindi, left Montreal to work at an international firm based in India. Finally, Selvamani, the Québécois joul and Tamil-speaking protagonist of this article, works at a biotech laboratory in a majority Québécois de souche town outside of Montreal and is married to a Tamil man who lives in India.

Diasporic subjectivities also prompt critiques of the local purist regime, particularly by disadvantaged youth raised in lower-income neighborhoods. These youth briefly expose systemic power relations and dismantle local status hierarchies through the interactive performance of non-purist styles. Arun, a Sri Lankan Tamil-Québécois youth, uses his multilingual expertise to challenge the implicit moral superiority of the Québécois de souche interlocutor who assumes, based on his phenotype, that Arun does not speak English or French. By responding with the phrase "*Je ne speak pas English*" or "*I don't parle français*," Arun challenges his interlocutor's implicit ideology of linguistic (and ethnoracial) purism by suggesting that the monolingual Québécois de souche speaker is no longer an icon of the Quebec nation or the Montreal cityscape. In striking at the heart of the stereotype that marks Tamil minorities as permanent "*étrangers*," Arun exploits his heightened metalinguistic awareness and highly developed sense of irony to stake and scale the conditions of his own belonging.

### Conclusion: Diaspora as a Mediating Scale

Zigon (2007) would describe Arun's, Ram's, and Mani's transgressive acts of multilingualism as engendering a moral breakdown in the "unreflective mode of being-in-the-world" of the nationalist interlocutor (2007:8). Their actions raise the possibility that low-status groups may exploit their multilingual repertoires to alter the scalar boundaries of their local environment and pave alternative pathways for social belonging. The reformatting of ideologies of linguistic purism within the mediating yet decentered context of the Montreal Tamil diasporas has produced unexpected inversions in social, economic, and moral status among Sri Lankan Tamil, Indian Tamil, and Québécois de souche social sub-groups. At times the multilingual expertise of Sri Lankan Tamil-Québécois youth has challenged the linguistic expertise of first generation Sri Lankan Tamil community leaders, the moral authority of Québécois de souche interlocutors, and the elite status of English-educated Indian Tamils. Ironically, the ethnolinguistic convergence of Tamil linguistic styles among second generation Montreal Tamil youth is being realized in spite of divergent efforts among Indian Tamil and Sri Lankan Tamil social sub-groups to spatially and temporally distinguish their vernacular languages. I argue that this unexpected convergence in non-purist multilingual practices and ideologies reflects a re-organization of scalar boundaries and sociolinguistic hierarchies, a process that is enregistering the formation of the new *ūr* style of Montreal Tamil.

### Notes

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1. In 1987, Quebec Premier Robert Bourassa negotiated the conditions under which Quebec would ratify the Canadian constitution. These criteria, which are included in the Meech Lake Accord, call for the official recognition of Quebec as a “distinct society” by the Canadian government. The term “distinct society”, which was coined by Premier Jean Lesage in the 1960s, is popularly believed to refer to Quebec’s laws, history, culture, and language. The Meech Lake Accord did not pass due to federalist fears of legitimizing Quebec’s nationalist aspirations. However, in 1995, after the narrow defeat of Quebec’s referendum for secession, Canadian Prime Minister Jean Chrétien recognized Quebec’s status as a “distinct society” (Lemco 1994).

2. Currently, minorities’ cultural and religious practices are being scrutinized by politicians and the media under the rubric of defining which “reasonable accommodations” would safely permit religious and cultural diversity in Quebec without infringing upon the constitutional principles of the Quebec politic (Messier 2007; Société 2007a; Société 2007b; Société 2008). In the 1980s and 1990s, immigrants’ linguistic preference for English rather than French was the subject of intense political and media scrutiny.

3. I refer to first generation Tamil immigrants as Indian Tamils or Sri Lankan Tamils (given their self-identification) and the second generation descendants of Tamil immigrants as Indian Tamil-Québécois or Sri Lankan Tamil-Québécois (given their citizenship status).

4. Joul refers to the linguistic style spoken by Montreal’s working class and other non-elite populations in Quebec. The term *joul* is a derivative of the French word for *horse*, “cheval,” thus dually implying a degenerative horse-like speech and a degenerative French phonology, morphology, and lexicon. Joul is believed to have developed out of linguistic contact between French and English in Montreal.

5. Québécois de souche refers to a white, French-speaking population of Quebec who traces its ancestry several centuries back to northwestern France. This term is increasingly being used by the academy and the media to replace the now obsolete terms of French Canadian, Québécois, Québécois pure laine, and francophone.

6. See Trautmann’s (2006) discussion of Ptolemaic and Mosaic technologies of location in post-18th century European thought.

7. Tamil-speakers in other cities or regions of Sri Lanka, such as Colombo or the eastern provinces, are popularly believed to speak linguistic styles of Tamil that have been corrupted by Sinhalese or Arabic.

8. Immediately after independence in 1948, the Indian Tamil population of Sri Lanka was constitutionally disenfranchised on the basis of their foreign ancestry. Through a series of agreements passed in 1964, 1986, and 1988 between India and Sri Lanka, there has been a gradual although incomplete enfranchisement of Indian Tamils.

9. The recent splitting of the paramilitary Karuna faction from the LTTE camp is thought to be due to a perceived sense of social inequality between higher-status northern Sri Lankan Tamils and lower-status eastern Sri Lankan Tamils.

10. The people of ancient Madurai are believed to speak a literary-like and purist vernacular of Tamil for two reasons: 1) their participation in the Third Literary Sangam, and 2) their central, isolated location from the “corrupting” influences of neighboring Dravidian and non-Dravidian languages.

11. By “French-educated” I mean that they were educated in France or in private European French schools in Quebec.

12. The recent election of the Conservative federal party and the increasing popularity of the conservative Action Démocratique du Québec (ADQ) provincial party among Quebec voters attest to a growing anti-immigration sentiment in Quebec.

13. See Lemco (1992) for a discussion of pro-French language legislation and McAndrew (1991) for a discussion of multicultural language policies.

14. The World Tamil Association (WTA), an organization that operates as the civil diaspora branch of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), sponsors political events and fundraising activities related to the Sri Lankan civil war.

15. The LTTE occupied a much more central and visible presence in prior Black July memorials. Community leaders would proudly fly the LTTE flag, openly televise messages from LTTE leader Velupillai Pirapaharan, and visibly host TRO (Tamil Rehabilitation Organization) fundraising booths.

16. Most fundraisers are sponsored by the World Tamil Association and the Tamil Rehabilitation Organization. Both organizations claim to raise political awareness and funds intended to relieve the suffering of Sri Lankan Tamil war victims. Before April 2006, the LTTE flag was openly flown at all fundraising and cultural events.

17. Decades of intermittent violence and social chaos have prevented several generations of Sri Lankan Tamil adults and youths from acquiring the higher education credentials required for white-collar employment in Canada (Daniel 1996).

18. Tamil Hindu temples are constructed according to specific textual guidelines of art, architecture, and sculpture that are referred to as *ākama cattiram*. Laborers from the temple-building caste were temporarily brought to Canada from India for the purpose of constructing these temples.

19. According to Peirce's first phenomenological trichotomy, there are qualisigns, sinsigns, and legisigns. Qualisigns are signs of "firstness" which exist by virtue of an abstracted quality.

20. According to Bill 101, which was passed in 1977, all children of immigrants must attend French-medium public schools. Some Indian Tamil-Québécois and Sri Lankan Tamil-Québécois children are able to attend English-medium public school if another immediate family member (usually a parent) has previously attended English-medium school (public or private) in Quebec or Canada.

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