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Author(s)	Seetha Lakshmi
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The Contribution of the Mass Media to the Teaching and Learning of Tamil Language in Singapore Schools

Dr Seetha Lakshmi

Tamil Language & Culture Division
National Institute of Education
Nanyang Technological University
Singapore

Introduction

With the world changing transforming like a fast moving vehicle, the Mass Media and Science have become the wheels of this vehicle, bringing about tremendous changes. In those days a village used to be a world by itself with people seldom treading further than their own village. Now the whole world has become a global village itself. The mass media has brought about an alarming change in our life and lifestyle. We will now look at how the mass media has brought about the changes and contributions in the teaching and learning of the Tamil language in Singapore.

Objectives

The objectives of this essay are:

1. What are the contributions of the Mass Media in the teaching and learning of Tamil language?
2. How can teachers utilize the Mass Media in their teaching and learning of Tamil Language.

3. How can the mass media further promote the teaching and learning of Tamil Language in Singapore.

Mass Media- Definition

The mass media is a tool of communication with the masses in a useful and organized way. The mass media sells its products to the masses on a large scale and for this reason it has to satisfy and provide good service to its customers and followers (William L Rivers, Wilbur Schramm, 1969). It communicates information to the masses and vice versa. As such it is safe to say that it is mass media since it provides services to the masses itself (Packirisamy Peter L., 1996). Since it communicates with the masses, the researcher used the term mass media in this essay. Mass media is changing people's life and it affects their way of life too. It is also changing the outlook of the people as it is the medium which has direct influence on their daily life.

The main role of mass media

The mass media has a crucial role to play in our society. Whatever information that the mass media provides must be informative, instructive and entertaining. It has to fulfill its role and aim for building social cohesion and a strong nation (Murugaian, A., 1977).

Mass Media

Many researchers and educationalists give various meaning and explanations to the term Mass Media.

Crea Dictionary mentions newspaper, television and radio as media. Whereas William L Rivers and Wilbur Schramm(1969) define that Radio, Television, Cinema, Magazines and books as mass media.

In Singapore even the buses, trains, taxis could be termed as mass media as they carry messages and advertisements for people to see, view and hear. In this essay the researcher has taken newspaper, radio and television as the definition for the mass media. Now we will first look at the contribution of the newspaper in the development of the teaching and learning of Tamil Language.

Newspaper

The newspaper is part of journalism and it is termed as daily as it carries news everyday. The newspaper has a strong attraction for people of all ages and all walks of life. The following section will discuss Tamil Murasu and its contribution.

Tamil Murasu

Tamil Murasu started its humble origin on the 6th of July 1935. It is the only Tamil newspaper in Singapore. It was a paper which contained most news on the thinking and upgrading of the lives of Tamilians. It contained 4 pages then. The Reformative Council's Chairman Mr G Sarangabany was its editor.

In the first editorial, he mentioned his objective and purpose of the newspaper as : “In those days the King’s

messenger beats the drum to pass messages to the people. But now the message is being spread by the newspaper. So, the job of the newspaper is to develop the status of Indians in Malaya in a drum’s name”(Thirunavukkarasu V., 1979:78). The term drum in Tamil is known as ‘Murasu’. Tamil Murasu has been in existence for 65 years now.

Radio

The radio provides soothing and comfortable sound messages to the masses. It is just like the newspaper. It is a means of communication with the people and it can be termed as a close companion because we can carry it around with us.

The History of the Tamil Radio in Singapore

The history of Tamil radio in Singapore was started in 1936. Currently there are 15 channels under the control of Media Corporation of Singapore. Tamil radio Oli 96.8 FM is one of them.

Television

The television is a combination of some characteristics of radio and the newspaper. The researchers have said that there are more television sets than telephones in the world. Television is one that has strong attraction and affection for the young. Many people find it a babysitter, night guest, teacher and as a companion to talk with (Michael W Gamble, Teri Kwal Gamble, 1989). In many ways it is also very useful and has become a necessity. We cannot imagine what life will

be in today's world without television. In one way it prevents people from going out and socializing. But nevertheless it has not failed to bring about awareness and greater understanding among the people of the world.

Tamil Television in Singapore

The Tamil television first took its place in Singapore on 15th February 1963. It was under the Radio Television Singapore (Pushpalatha, 2000). In those days it was a luxury to own a television set as it was out of reach for many people.

Mass Media in the Teaching and Learning of Tamil Language in Singapore

Language is an instrument of communication for mankind. Language which is the best form of communication for the purpose of exchanging knowledge, wisdom and conveyance of constructive information. Thus when a person talks intellectually and proficiently, he conveys an ideal message. He influences others and brings repute to the language he speaks. The language must assist in bringing about harmony between people of different background and culture. The person using it does to propagate it in a manner others understand him and vice versa. In fact such a language when communicated well brings about a greater confidence to the people to speak the language and to enable the language itself to survive over time. History has shown that some languages and

their beauty has never faded but has lived through time and is of great interest and love for the language has grown for them.

The Objective of Learning a Language

In Singapore the Tamil students who study in schools must communicate with their fellow students in the language in schools and in public places. This is the aim of teaching Tamil language as a mother tongue in school. This will enable them to communicate with one another and understand the language better.

The students should study with interest all the good texts, understand their culture, racial identity and follow them in life and develop confidence in their language.

The teaching and learning of Tamil language primarily helps the students to learn and understand Tamil and live as a Tamilian and a good Singaporean with better understanding of their roots. They will understand their identity through the study of history, culture and literature of Tamilians.

The mass media plays a significant role in the teaching and learning of Tamil language. This has also been stressed by educators (Gopinathan, S., 2000). In a survey conducted among Tamil teachers it was found that 95% of them use Tamil Murasu in their teaching. 70% of them used the Radio and Television in their

teaching. Now we will see what role both radio and tv play in the teaching and learning of Tamil language.

Tamil Murasu in Teaching and Learning Language

Newspapers help us to understand current affairs in today's world. Newspapers read not only in the whole world but by Singaporeans as well. In a research conducted among 280 Tamilians the study (Seetha Lakshmi, 2002) found that 38% read the papers daily. A significant number of people read it once a week. Newspapers should develop further to increase its readership. The teachers found that the newspaper was easy to preserve now and be used later and also its price is very reasonable for them to use in their teaching. The newspaper is also used in teaching and developing reading skills (86%) and teaching other language skills such as speaking, writing and listening.

How Tamil Murasu can be used in the Learning of Language?

We can use the Tamil Murasu for a multipurpose role or teaching integrated skills. We can also use this newspaper to develop certain skills from teaching the 4 basic language skills. It also enables the reader to develop not only the 4 skills but skills like pronunciation, writing, writing thinking skills, national education, creating literature, preserving the culture and living confidently as an individual. The researcher will explain briefly some examples on teaching and learning language through Tamil Murasu newspapers.

Writing

A person will possess four different language skills. They are listening, speaking, reading and writing. Writing comes in after acquiring listening, speaking, reading skills. However well a person speaks it must be translated in writing to capture the reader. Otherwise he may not be understood. Tamil Murasu's students' supplementary paper has modern essays in developing the writing skills. For secondary school students there are many thoughtful and innovative titles for them to choose, pick and write for themselves.

Developing Thinking Skills

Youths are energetic, thoughtless and rash. And they are always wanting and willing to take up challenges. But as seniority is reached, thoughtfulness and pondering comes in (Francis Picabia., 1878-1953). What he said applies today too. The youngsters when given good advice by elders will seldom listen. But whenever their favourite actor or actress tells it, it may sound sweet in their minds and thoughts. This psychology applies to students also. The teachers can apply quotations from famous actors, politicians and sportsmen to develop their thinking skills. This will create interest in lessons. And they can use this to develop the language skills and national education.

Teaching of Culture

When students study the Tamil Language it is not only to score in the examination or to learn how to use the language. But they have to follow their culture and

values which is the real meaning for language education. There are many ways in which Tamil Murasu will be able to teach culture. Culture will keep changing with time in a meaningful way. For example the Chingay festival and Deepavali light ups also explain the changes which have taken place in traditions. Many years back it was not a tradition. But with changing times the Deepavali lightup at Serangoon Road has become traditional and has added a new light to our culture as many Indians take part in the 'Chingay' procession and Deepavali light up and they also form part of the tourist attraction.

Uses of the Bilingual Page

The bilingual page is helpful for those who are not very proficient but also those who are not conversant in English to develop their skills. The pictures and stories are helpful for teachers who can teach the integrated skills with the help of co-operative learning. Each group can be given a story to analyse, present and share in the class. The students can be asked to give a suitable title and ask 5 questions related to the story. The teacher can show the titles, stories and ask them to match them accordingly with the texts and visuals.

Students' Supplement

The main idea is to develop the student supplement and to give students confidence. They can be creative and contribute in Tamil. This supplement comes with Tamil related literary stories, pictures, cultural practices and beliefs of people from different

backgrounds. All these will be helpful for the teachers. They can keep these newspapers or simply scan and use them through the computer.

Using Cartoons to Teach Writing

Tamil Murasu has a lot of comical strips. These remind us of the old cartoons like Popeye the Sailorman. It is a good strategy to use in teaching, by deleting away the original words except the starting and ending sentences of the story. The teacher can ask the students to write their own versions. This will help them to develop their imagination, thinking and creative writing skills.

Tamil Murasu plays an important role in the teaching and learning of Tamil language. In the beginning it assisted in the development of literary Tamil and creative literature. Now it aims to improve contribution in the development of students' interest in Tamil.

The Contribution of the Radio.

Thiruvalluvar the Tamil poet said that the best form of wealth that one can receive is the listening skill. The radio helps to develop listening interest while educating the listeners at the same time. It brings pleasure, happiness and joy. It is also very informative. The Tamil radio arouses the interest of audience of all ages. A survey has shown that because of its round-the-clock services, many listen to the radio as a form of listening pleasure(59%). Many people listen to the radio because of their interest in music(36%), love of

the language(28%) and to develop Tamil knowledge(19%).

Many Tamil teachers said that they use the radio in their teaching to develop the listening skills of their students. Next they use the radio to improve skills such as speaking, writing and reading respectively. Besides helping the teachers let us see how it can help further in teaching.

A Kurall(Tamil Poem) For A Day(Naalum Oru Kurall)

This programme explains about Thiruvalluvar's ethical poems. Each day one poem is read with detailed explanation and understanding related to our day to day life. To the listeners and students it is an educational and thought provoking programme. This programme can be very useful for teaching listening, speaking and writing skills in the language classroom. In the classroom the teacher can record one *kurall* and its explanation and let the students listen to it. After that the teacher chooses a topic or a question on the theme of the *kurall*. Now the students will start thinking. This activity can be done as a pair or as group work. After the thinking session the teacher can ask them to share and create a lively discussion. This helps in their language skills, thinking skills and shows their special talents. If this topic is conducted for 2 lesson periods the teacher could get the students to write a composition to make it even more complete, constructive and productive.

The composition can be compiled and placed for other students' use in the library. This method can boost the students morale and confidence when they know that their work has been given recognition and it helps in their character building.

Radio Interviews

In the early days, those who were educated, well to do and with time to spare often spoke on radio and telephone. Now with the availability of TV and radio and a good education given by the government to all, many have the opportunity to air their views. The students can learn from these programmes as they have a chance to analyse how other people are talking, addressing others, how they quote and forward their points during a discussion. This programme is widely used in classrooms.

This programme is very good in helping the students in pre-activity or warm up activity at the start of a lesson. The students will benefit most when good interviews with well known and famous people are conducted. Their chances of picking up good knowledge and understanding of people with character, ambition and purpose will help them in their future life as adults.

Non-stop Music

According to the audience polling at the Oli website the programme that delights most of the audience is the non stop music in the evenings. Many students take part in this programme. They request and dedicate the

songs to families and friends. Many students use the radio as a gateway to voice their messages and desires i.e. the programme called *Minnale minnale*. Some of these programmes in the media play a two way communication with interaction and entertainment. These programmes play an important role in teaching, speaking and listening skills.

The news in Tamil not only brings information on current affairs but also helps students to write their composition with better language skills. The teachers can record the news on the radio and use them in their classroom for their reading lessons. Selected passages can be used for dictation lessons too.

The songs broadcast over radio play a significant role in the language and moral education lessons. For example '*Engal Veetil Ella Naalum Kaarthigai*', '*Chinna Chinna Asai*', '*Edho Oru Paattu En Kaadhil Ketkum*', '*Amma Enru Azhaikkaadha Uyirillaiye*'. The teacher has to record them and has to type the lyrics and use them for the listening lesson. These songs over the radio provides language education in an interesting and enjoyable way.

Programmes on general knowledge which are aired on festival occasions help in the teaching of national education. These programmes help to provide better understanding of our culture and that of others in our multilingual and multicultural society.

Radio Programmes Through Computer

In the early days there was no lesson without teachers. Now no lessons can be conducted without a computer. The computer has become 3 in one, i.e. we can read the newspapers, listen to the radio, watch TV programmes through the internet. In the past we can do one or two things at one time. We can read the paper while listening to radio or when watching television. The mass media incorporated with IT support the computer has become a requirement and a tool in teaching language.

Oli 96.8 conducts many surveys through its website. Generally it caters for the young but some programmes about patriotism and family values are included too. Some of the topics on this are: 1. How to be a good Parent/father? 2. How to make our life worthwhile? How do you evaluate Oli 24hours round the clock service? Who will take over Vairamuthu in song writing in Tamil films? We can never predict that the listeners are always correct but their feedback matters. It helps to use these materialsx to add variety in teaching. In the survey on how to be a good father, a teacher can conduct an integrated skills lesson. They can also create new surveys and ask the students to answer them. Through this the teacher can help the students to develop thinking and evaluation skills.

Television

Television has many viewers in both the developed and developing countries. In developing countries

television has become a good means of education for the masses. They bring about awareness among the people. In comparison to journalism and radio, it has the distinction of providing pictures for viewing, analyzing and recording for future use.

Listening and Speaking

Students can learn many things from Tamil television news. For example when news is read, students learn how to speak formally, the kind of matters to talk on a given topic and reading with proper pronunciation. A selected passage from the news can be used to teach comprehension. There are many programmes which are suitable for students that can be recorded and shown to the students as and when needed according to the themes.

The mass media should aim to inform, instruct and entertain. More Entertainment, Current Affairs and Drama programmes are being telecast in television. For example, '*Pesuvom*', '*30 Nimidangal*' and Drama. Drama imported from India is thought provoking and creates a cultural awareness among the students. All these programmes can be used for lessons in speaking, writing and understanding of their fellow Tamilians in other countries.

The teacher also can take some of the good songs and excerpts from the cinema for their speaking, writing and thinking lessons. The teachers can show the recorded programmes with no volumes and ask the

students to discuss and share their opinions. For the programmes on television the teacher can create other activities for their lessons. These activities can be done through good and careful planning of lessons.

Recommendations

A student feels happy when his article is published in the newspaper or broadcast over Radio and Television. He gets monetary awards and praise. Therefore more programmes can be planned with monetary awards to encourage the students to take part and arouse their interest in the language.

All news broadcasts over the radio can be recorded and can be heard via the internet. This service is in written form. The BBC has archived its news broadcasts in written and audio form. It has setup a dictionary and a geographical map to help in finding the meanings of difficult words. It has simplified it according to its readers' ability to understand difficult words by rendering such a service. It is a self service. Students do comprehension while reading news and the mass media has contributed by upgrading its service continuously. This is a good contribution by the mass media in the development of language and teaching. Poetry can be written over the internet with the poet's voice recorded. There can also be blank columns and Multiple Choice Questions for the readers to answer while listening to poetry. If such a novelty is introduced in the Tamil media it will help in the development of teaching and learning of Tamil

language. The original voice of the poet creates interest and understanding of the poem and the language.

In the Radio through telephone conversation, the presenter asks questions which the caller answers. These questions can be turned into useful conversation for the development of the language of the students. The presenter can focus more on questions that deal with the callers' achievements, goals and interests in Tamil language. This will set listeners' thinking and help in the development of the language spoken by the Tamilians.

A language which is recognized at national level and taught in schools will always have more opportunities to improve. Ours is one of the languages which is fortunate to have this status. The teachers should take this as an advantage and find ways and means to improve the teaching methods and create an interest for students learning it. Using the mass media to teach the language will enhance teaching and will assist the teachers greatly.

Radio and Television which caters for the youngsters should include some hints and quotations on Tamil by prominent people on Tamil language and culture. They can include programmes on foreign scholars who have worked hard to improve our language and culture. As Tamilians, we should feel proud of our language. Programmes of this form can be a motivating factor in language development.

When the media is conducting science programmes they could present it well in Tamil language with special attention on the beauty of the language. This will create an interest in science as well as on our language.

Conclusion

When we want to send an invitation, greeting or any special messages, there are thousands of websites which are ready for our use with animated pictures. For example in 'Flowgo' website, after reading the greetings, we cannot immediately close the programme. An attractive advertisement will pop up and indirectly focus our attention to it. This will enable the reader to read the attractive message and to develop an interest in the language. This strategy can be used in Tamil language and mass media could help in the development.

Although Tamil teachers are doing a good job in teaching with the help of mass media they can still fine tune it to more effective by choosing the programme in the mass media according to the theme of the lesson, age, experience and interest. When the teachers continuously use the mass media in their teaching, the mass media will also try to cater to their needs by improving their products.

For a language to be a living language and keep its continuity, society has to take steps to improve it. One of the ways in which the Tamil language can be

improved is by encouraging the Tamil speaking population to speak Tamil at home and outside their home among the Tamil people. Tamil being an official language and Tamil language in the media, the people should fully utilize the encouragement and assistance given by the Government for their advantage and further develop the Tamil language.

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