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## “Is Jaffna Tamil the Best?” Producing “Legitimate” Language in a Multilingual Sri Lankan School

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*Drawing on research in the Tamil-medium stream of a multilingual Buddhist National school in Kandy, Sri Lanka, this article explores how teachers engage with, negotiate, and contest sociolinguistic hierarchies. Since the colonial period, Jaffna Tamils have maintained a hierarchy over other Tamil-speaking groups (Up-country Tamils and Muslims) in education, with Jaffna Tamil legitimized in the national curriculum. However, as a result of demographic and institutional shifts related to the outbreak of the Civil War in 1983, these hierarchies are shifting. In the first part of the article, I explore teachers’ explicit discussions and debates about language that occurred in my presence. In the second part, I show are these ideologies are enacted in difference contexts of practice, including subject-area classrooms, language classrooms, and oratorical performances. I argue that incongruities within and between teachers’ metadiscourses and practices reveal subtle dynamics in the configuration of social hierarchies. [multilingual education, social inequality, language ideologies, metadiscourse, Tamil]*

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Schools have long been considered key sites for the construction and negotiation of linguistic hegemonies. Bourdieu (1977, 1991) illustrates the importance of education and state-level standardization in the creation and reproduction of sociolinguistic hierarchies, which he likens to economic hierarchies. He argues that it is in the process of state formation that the conditions are created for the constitution of a linguistic market, dominated by the “official” language. The agents of the regulation and imposition of the “official” language are teachers, acting through the institution of the school. According to Bourdieu, when the “official” language is fully inculcated, it becomes a tool of “symbolic” domination, where subordinate classes devalue their own dialect in favor of an “official” dialect that they are sometimes unable to fully produce. In a prominent critique of Bourdieu, Woolard (1985) argues that while he allows for the existence of multiple linguistic markets, he does not allow for alternative or counter “legitimate” languages. In reference to her research in Catalonia, she argues that the authority of the “official” language can be challenged by members of the oppressed language groups. She also demonstrates how it can be as important to produce correct forms of the vernacular in local contexts as it is to produce correct standard forms in the wider linguistic market (1985).

Rather than assuming that schools perpetuate a single “official” language, recent literature in the linguistic anthropology of education explores schools as complex ideological landscapes where multiple (and sometimes competing) sociolinguistic norms and hierarchies are reproduced and contested (Bucholtz 2001; Gal and Woolard 1995; Heller 1996, 2001; Jaffe 1999, 2003; Stroud 1999; Wortham 2008;

Wortham and Rymes 2002). Influenced by Woolard's (1985) account of dominant and counter "legitimate" languages, studies observe that while some sociolinguistic hierarchies are sanctioned by the state, others are ratified through their connections to non-state-level institutions, social groups, and practices (Jaffe 1999; Meek 2010; Mendoza-Denton 2008; Rampton 1995). In studying the way that sociolinguistic hegemonomies are negotiated in school-settings, what remains to be more fully considered is in what contexts of practice do particular ideologies of correct or appropriate speech come to the forefront. In addition, what is the difference between what is at stake in how these ideologies are enacted in teachers' metadiscourse vs. the way that they correct and evaluate students on the basis of their speech?

This article draws on ethnographic research conducted in the Tamil-medium stream of Girls' College, a multilingual Buddhist national school in Kandy, Sri Lanka. Since the British colonial period (1815–1948), Tamils from the Jaffna region in the North have maintained a hierarchy over other Tamil-speaking groups (Up-country Tamils and Muslims) in Tamil-medium education, with Jaffna Tamil legitimized in the national curriculum. However, as a result of demographic and institutional shifts related to outbreak of the Civil War between the Sri Lankan government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in 1983, hierarchies among Tamil-speaking groups are shifting in both the curriculum and school-based social practices. As I show, at Girls' College there is a disjuncture between a widely circulating ideology that Jaffna Tamil is the "best," and the actual sociolinguistic situation, with the majority of teachers and students speaking "normalized" Up-country Tamil varieties common in the region. In this article, I draw on observations and recordings of Tamil-medium teachers' interactions in different spaces in the school (the canteen, the staff room, and classrooms) to explore how they engage with, negotiate, and contest sociolinguistic hierarchies both in metadiscourses and evaluative practices.

Building on recent literature in linguistic anthropology, I investigate how linguistic ideologies are linked to particular contexts of practice. Within language ideological studies, there has been a recent push to understand ideologies not as being evenly distributed across social space but as having a domain (Agha 2007; Silverstein 1985, 1993; Wortham 2008). Agha (2007) defines a language ideological domain as a set of people (pairs to local groups to global language communities) who recognize the indexical link between a type of sign and the relevant ideology. As other scholars also observe (see Bartlett 2007; Mehan et al. 1996; Mendoza-Denton 2008; Philips 1998, 2000; Stroud 1999; Wortham 2005, 2006), it is thus not sufficient to describe the content of ideologies or discourses; they need to be linked to individuals, institutions, and practices, across space and time. Linguistic anthropological studies have highlighted the necessity of distinguishing ideologies involved in metadiscourse (talk about talk) and language use (Irvine 2001; Jaffe 1999; Meek 2010; Silverstein 1979; Silverstein and Urban 1996; Urban 1991). Drawing on her research on Corsican language revitalization processes, Jaffe (1999) argues that it is a mistake to view spontaneous linguistic practices as more real than explicit ideological statements about language. She writes, "Rather, the point is to explore social forces that shape discourse and metadiscourse, as well as the dialectal tension between discourse and metadiscourse that may well be central to the process of culture" (1999:15). In this article, I explore language ideological processes in relation to different contexts of practice. Drawing on Jaffe (1999), rather than sharply differentiating metadiscourse from discourse, I explore the complexities both within and across teachers' metadiscourses and evaluative practices.

In the first part of the article, I explore teachers' explicit discussions and debates about language that occurred in my presence, as a white American female with a high-level of proficiency in Tamil. I show that while the distinction between Jaffna and non-Jaffna Tamil pervaded teachers' metadiscourse, as a reflection of emergent hierarchies among Tamil-speaking groups in the post-1983 period, other ideologies, sociolinguistic hierarchies, and evaluative frameworks are also pertinent. In the second part of the article, I demonstrate how teachers enact ideologies in different

contexts of practice, including subject-area classrooms, language classrooms, and Tamil oratorical performances. I conclude by showing how the incongruities within and across teachers' ideological assertions and practices reveal subtle dynamics in the configuration of social inequalities.

### **Educational Policy and Conflict**

In Sri Lanka, the majority of the population is Sinhalese Buddhist. The largest minority group are Tamils, who have been historically differentiated into two groups or subethnicities: North (Jaffna) and East (Batticaloa) Tamils, who settled on the island 2,000 years ago; and Up-country Tamils, who came from South India during the British period to work as laborers on the plantations in the South-Central highlands (Daniel 1996; Little 2003). The second largest minority group is Muslims, some of whom are descendants of Arab traders who settled on the island 900 years ago; and others who are descendants of Indian traders of more recent origin (Little 2003). Though the majority of Muslims speak Tamil as a first language, they identify as a separate ethno-religious group (Nuhuman 2007).

During the British colonial period, Jaffna Tamils enjoyed privileged access to English-medium education, and, as a result, held civil service and professional jobs disproportionate to their population (Tambiah 1986). In the post-independence period, the Sinhalese Buddhist majority government sought to even out these inequities by passing policies to improve access to resources for Sinhalese, at the direct expense of Tamil minorities. Sinhala was made the sole official language of Sri Lanka in 1956 (Tamil was declared a co-official language in 1987), severely limiting Tamil-speakers' access to government jobs. In the early 1970s, Jaffna Tamils received an additional blow to their status and future prospects when the government passed policies regulating university admissions on the basis of medium of instruction (Sinhala or Tamil) and area of residence. While beneficial to other Tamil-speaking groups, these policies severely reduced Jaffna Tamils' chances of getting into universities (Sorenson 2008). By the early 1980s, the LTTE, which started off as a guerilla movement among disgruntled youth in the Jaffna peninsula, defeated similar organizations to become the predominant Tamil insurgency group. In 1983, anti-Tamil ethnic riots—the so-called "Black July"—plunged Sri Lanka into a full-scale Civil War between the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE (Tambiah 1986). While Batticaloa Tamils were directly involved in the conflict, Up-country Tamils and Muslims remained mostly on the periphery of it (Bass 2012; Daniel 1996). The educational policies passed in the post-independence period resulted in the creation of a centralized mass-educational system, where all school-aged children are guaranteed a free education in their first language. However, the separation of students on the basis of language medium (Sinhala and Tamil) and religion (Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity, and Islam) exacerbated the conflict by increasing interethnic enmity and mistrust (de Silva 1999; Perera et al. 2004; Wickrema and Colenso 2003).

My research was conducted in Kandy, Sri Lanka from June 2007 to August 2008, during the final phase of the Civil War. Seeking a military solution to the conflict, the Sri Lankan army was in the midst of a large military campaign to gain control of LTTE territory in the northern Vanni region, just south of the Jaffna Peninsula (Devotta 2009). In May 2009, after infiltrating the last LTTE strongholds and killing its commander, Velupillai Prabhakaran, the Sri Lankan army declared victory over the LTTE. During the time of my research, though Sri Lankans in the Sinhalese-majority South were at a safe distance from the battle zones in the North and East, they lived in constant fear of civilian targeted violence, arrest, or disappearance. Kandy is situated in the heart of the tea plantation region in the South-Central highlands. The former seat of the last independent Sinhalese Buddhist kingdom, which was annexed by the British in 1815, it is a symbolic center for Buddhism and the Buddhist state (Roberts 1979). However, it is also a multilingual and multiethnic urban center, with Sinhalese, Tamils, and Muslims living in the same residential neighborhoods (Tambiah 1986).

Girls' College is a Buddhist national school located in Kandy town. Among the top girls' educational institutions on the island, it is one of the few government schools in Sri Lanka that with Sinhala-, Tamil-, and English-medium streams combines students from all major ethnic and religious backgrounds.

In official publications and school-wide events, Girls' College attempts to promote a multiethnic and multicultural school identity. However, in practice, the Sinhala- and Tamil-medium streams comprise distinct spheres of practice. The dominant language of the school is Sinhala (English is sometimes used in announcements), with Tamil restricted to the Tamil-medium stream. Tamil-medium students (50% Tamil and 50% Muslim), though highly multilingual in Tamil, Sinhala, and English, are separated from the Sinhala-medium students in all academic and extracurricular activities and rarely interact elsewhere. In addition, the success of the newly introduced English-medium stream to integrate students has been minimal, as it is restricted to select subjects at the secondary level (English literature, math, and science), with students returning to their separate Sinhala- and Tamil-medium classes for all other subjects.

### **Hierarchies in Tamil-Medium Education**

The subordinate relationship of the Tamil-medium stream to the Sinhalese mainstream of the school is consistent with state-level hegemonies. However, the hierarchies within the Tamil-medium stream, which are the focus of this article, are more related to institutional hierarchies among Tamil-speaking groups. As discussed above, in the colonial and post-colonial periods, Jaffna Tamils (and Batticaloa Tamils, to a lesser extent) held a sociocultural and economic hierarchy over Up-country Tamils and Muslims, who did not come for formal education until the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The seat of the medieval Tamil kingdom conquered by the Portuguese in 1619, the Jaffna peninsula has long been considered the center of Sri Lankan Tamil literary culture and education. Under Portuguese, Dutch, and British rule, Jaffna developed some of the first western educational institutions on the island. As the arid and harsh climate made agriculture difficult, during British rule, Jaffna Tamils sought civil service and professional jobs in the Sinhalese-majority South (McGilvray 2008). While the 1956 Sinhala-Only Act greatly reduced Jaffna Tamils' access to government jobs, they maintained dominance in Tamil-medium government positions, particularly in education.

During Portuguese and Dutch colonial rule in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, Sri Lanka's easternmost region (centered in the present-day city of Batticaloa) was part of the feudal territories of the Kandyan Kingdom. In the British period, eastern Tamils had some access to government and professional jobs but felt under the hegemony of Jaffna Tamils (McGilvray 2008). Though the East is a socioculturally, linguistically, and historically distinct region from the North (McGilvray 2008), because of North and East Tamils' shared status as Sri Lanka's so-called "original" Tamils, in the South Sinhalese and other Tamil-speaking groups often collapse eastern Tamils into the category "North and East Tamils," or subsume them into the category "Jaffna."

In the colonial and post-colonial periods, the children of tea plantation workers were educated in low-quality plantation schools, which were distinct from the national educational system. Rendered stateless following the 1948 Ceylon Citizenship Act, Up-country youth did not have the option of attending government schools (Bass 2012). The advancement of Up-country Tamils in education was the result of the state-takeover of plantation schools from 1977 to 1992 and the fact that by 1988, the majority of Up-country Tamils regained citizenship (Little 2003). During the colonial period, Muslim leaders discouraged Muslims from pursuing education in missionary schools, fearing that they would be vehicles for religious conversion (Nuhuman 2007). However, in the 1970s and 1980s, Muslims made large strides in formal

education when the growing urban-based Muslim middle-class shifted from pursuing business and trade toward education and the professions (O'Sullivan 1999).

In the early 1980s, almost all Tamil-medium government jobs in Sri Lanka were dominated by Tamils from the North and East. However, in the decades following the outbreak of the Civil War in 1983, there were significant demographic and institutional shifts among Tamil-speaking groups. Large numbers of North and East Tamils fled Sri Lanka, seeking asylum in North America, Europe, and Australia (Daniel 1996). During this period, Up-country Tamils and Muslims started to enter Tamil-medium government jobs. In the Central Province (whose capital is Kandy), Up-country and Muslim teachers currently outnumber teachers from the North and East. However, despite the fact that North and East Tamils are no longer in the numerical majority in education, they retain high-status positions. There are only a small number of North and East Tamil teachers in provincial schools, but a large number can be found at prestigious national schools. In addition, North and East Tamils tend to teach highly valued subjects such as math and science, while Up-country Tamils and Muslims teach arts. Before turning to the Girls' College Tamil-medium stream, I frame my argument by discussing ideologies of diglossia and the Sri Lankan Tamil sociolinguistic situation. I show also how the sociolinguistic dominance of Jaffna Tamil over other Tamil varieties is in flux, not only in terms of teacher demographics but also in the national curriculum.

### Sri Lankan Tamil Varieties and Ideologies of Diglossia

Because of the differences between genres of literary Tamil and the language of spoken communication, sociolinguists have long applied the concept of diglossia to the Tamil sociolinguistic situation (Britto 1986; Karunakaran 2005; Schiffman 1999; Zvelebil 1959–1964). Diglossia theorizes the existence of opposed yet related linguistic varieties that are ranked as high or low, formal or informal, literary or vernacular (Ferguson 1959, 1991; Fishman 1965). Diglossia has been heavily criticized by sociolinguists and linguistic anthropologists for reducing complex sociolinguistic situations to a set of static relations (Garcia 2009; Jaffe 1999; Khubchandani 1985; Martin-Jones 1989). Schieffelin and Woolard astutely observe that diglossia corresponds less to a description of a sociolinguistic situation than an "ideological naturalization of sociolinguistic arrangements" (1994:69). In this article, I show how diglossic relationships are evoked and reproduced in discourse as shared ideological frameworks.

As Das (2008) discusses, the division between high and low Tamil was itself the result of colonial and nationalist policies of sociolinguistic purification and philological classification (in both Jaffna and India). In early 20<sup>th</sup>-century Jaffna, an early version of a Sri Lankan Tamil literary "standard" was compiled by Tamil nationalist leaders by putting together stylistic features from the poetic genre of classical Tamil with grammatical features from the vernacular language of Jaffna Tamil elites (2008). As Das writes, "This standardization effort prompted the formation of a coeval chronotype 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 13<sup>th</sup>–17<sup>th</sup> centuries), the contemporary Jaffna peninsula, and the projected Tamil Eelam" (2008:5). Genres of literary (*ilakkiya*) or pure Tamil (*centamizh*) were then ideologically contrasted with the everyday language of communication, which was considered to be corrupt (*kochai*) (Das 2008).

Genres of literary and spoken Tamil differ from one another in terms of phonology, morphology, syntax, and lexicon (see Annamalai 2007; Levinson 1983). Literary Tamil is not restricted to writing but is produced in forms of traditional Tamil oratory, including recitation, drama, and debate. Spoken Tamil can also be written (in Tamil or roman script), such as in dialogue portions of movie scripts, plays, radio scripts, newspapers, and magazines articles (Britto 1986). In Sri Lanka, as well as South India, one of the main goals of primary and secondary education is to produce the literary register in writing and oratory. Producing the literary variety involves using forms

that are grammatically recognized to be literary in addition to correct technical terms from the syllabus. While students and teachers are expected to speak only literary Tamil in the classroom, in practice, they mix literary and spoken Tamil varieties. In addition, there is also some indeterminacy between what counts as literary Tamil and what counts as spoken Tamil. A common pattern I observed in Tamil-medium classrooms was that teachers would use a variety close to literary Tamil when directly referring to the subject material and forms closer to spoken Tamil when managing the class (eliciting responses, disciplining students, and conducting administrative tasks).

Most of the sociolinguistics research on Sri Lankan Tamil varieties has come out of Jaffna University. Highly invested in the superiority of Jaffna Tamil over other Tamil varieties, these studies often treat Jaffna Tamil as representative of the Sri Lankan Tamil sociolinguistic situation as a whole. However, recent literature has documented other varieties of Tamil spoken in Sri Lanka, including Batticaloa Tamil, Up-country Tamil, and Muslim Tamil. Jaffna Tamil is characterized as a variety of Tamil originally spoken in the Jaffna Peninsula, which, as a result of relative isolation Indian Tamil varieties, developed unique lexical and grammatical features (Gair and Suseendrarajah 1981; Suseendrarajah 1999; Thananjayarajasingham 1974, 1977). Batticaloa Tamil is described as a variety of Tamil spoken in Sri Lanka's eastern region, differing from Jaffna Tamil in terms of lexico-semantics and pronoun systems. Literature describes Up-country Tamil, centered in the tea-growing areas of the South-Central highlands, as most closely related to the varieties of Tamil spoken in India (Suseendrarajah 1999). Muslim Tamil is distinguished from other Sri Lankan Tamil varieties in terms of lexicon (Perso-Arabic borrowings) and grammar (Hussein 2009; Nuhuman 2007).

Focused on distinguishing different named varieties (and those who speak them), Sri Lankan Tamil sociolinguists have not considered the obvious emergence of Tamil koines (Watt and Milroy 1999) in urban regions in the Sinhalese-majority South (such as Kandy), where North and East Tamils, Up-country Tamils, and Muslims live in close proximity. Because of the monopoly of Jaffna Tamils in Tamil-medium education, the influence of Jaffna Tamil on the speech of other Tamil-speaking groups has been particularly significant. I refer to the Tamil koine in Kandy and surrounding areas as "normalized" Up-country spoken Tamil. This koine can be considered to be a middle ground between "literary" Tamil and negatively valued spoken varieties, as it corrects to the "literary" variety to a limited extent (thus enabling its wide comprehensibility). I avoid the use of the term "standard" in classifying "normalized" Up-country spoken Tamil as it can imply that a variety is uniform or that it is legitimized at the level of the state or other institutions (Milroy 2001).

Related to the institutional hegemony of Jaffna Tamils in Tamil-medium education, the government Tamil-medium curriculum ratified the superiority of Jaffna Tamil until recently. The curriculum was compiled exclusively by Jaffna Tamils, who wrote original materials and imported supplementary materials from India. The difference between literary varieties in India and Jaffna is relatively small, with Jaffna styles including archaic features, and Indian styles incorporating colloquial forms (Suseendrarajah 1999). The ratification of Jaffna Tamil was particularly apparent in the Tamil-as-a-subject syllabus, which only included material by Jaffna and Indian writers. Jaffna-spoken Tamil could be found in dialogues in stories and poetry written by Jaffna authors. However, in 2003, the National Institute of Education (NIE), as part of a program to remove bias in the national Sinhala and Tamil curricula, revised the Tamil-medium syllabus to include materials written by Sri Lankan Tamil speakers from a variety of social backgrounds. The new Tamil-as-a-subject syllabus includes poetry and stories written by a variety of Sri Lankan Tamil-speaking groups, including Eastern Tamils, Up-country Tamils, and Muslims.

At Girls' College, while the entrenched hierarchy of Jaffna Tamils over other Tamil-speaking groups is in flux in both teacher demographics and the linguistic forms ratified in the national curriculum, Jaffna Tamil teachers maintain a dominant presence. In explicit discussions about language, Jaffna teachers at Girls' College (and elsewhere) instantiate their dominance through frequent claims that Jaffna Tamil is

the most "pure," "original," and "literary" variety. However, there is a disjuncture between the variety that is widely held to be the "best" (Jaffna Tamil) and the variety that is commonly spoken. At Girls' College, while there are an equal number of North and East Tamil, Up-country Tamil, and Muslim teachers, the overwhelming majority of students are Up-country Tamils and Muslims, who do not employ Jaffna spoken Tamil, but rather "normalized" Up-country spoken varieties. In this article, I show how in the context of this disjuncture, Tamil-medium teachers, in explicit discussions and debates about language, negotiate and contest sociolinguistic hierarchies. In addition, I also consider how ideologies of sociolinguistic difference are enacted in evaluative practices.

### Girls' College Tamil-Medium Teachers

I was first introduced to Girls' College by my Sinhala teacher, whose wife was a senior teacher at the school. The principal (who is a Sinhalese Buddhist) and I agreed that in order to give back to the school, I would supplement my research by teaching English to the grades 9 and 10 English-medium classes. I conducted research at Girls' College for a seven-month period—January to August 2008. My daily routine consisted of teaching in the morning, and observing and recording students' linguistic practices for three hours in the afternoon (focusing on the grade 10 Tamil-medium class). In between classes, I recorded Tamil-medium teachers' interactions in various spaces in the school.

Outside brief encounters in the main office complex, the school grounds, or the canteen, Tamil- and Sinhala-medium teachers interacted very little with one another. When Tamil-medium teachers were not in classrooms, they could be found in the Tamil-medium staff room. Despite the fact that I entered the school through a Sinhalese contact, my proficiency in Tamil allowed me to become fast friends with many of the Tamil-medium teachers. Though I was close with some of the Sinhalese teachers as well, my relationship with Sinhalese teachers was strained due to communication issues. Sinhalese teachers were not as proficient in English as the Tamil-medium teachers and my competency in Sinhala was minimal. In addition, the fact that I was a Tamil-speaking American who was mainly interested in the Tamil-medium stream caused some of the Sinhalese teachers to become suspicious of my intentions. For example, during the first month of my research there was a rumor among the Sinhalese teachers that I was a CIA agent sent to research discrimination against Tamil students. Throughout my research, I tried to alleviate such concerns by clearly explaining in my beginning-level Sinhala and English that I was a doctoral student from the University of Michigan on a Fulbright Fellowship to do research on Tamil language practices. Familiar with post-graduate research, teachers generally responded well to my efforts to explain my background and research project.

Though they differed from one another in very complex ways (related to ethnicity, subethnicity, religion, caste, class, socioeconomic level, place of origin, educational level, and English proficiency), Tamil-medium teachers frequently distinguished themselves in terms of the categories "Jaffna," "Batticaloa," "Up-country," and "Muslim." While "Jaffna" refers to Tamils with a geographical origin in the North, "Batticaloa" refers to Tamils with a geographical origin in the East. Coming into popular usage in the early 1990s, the term "Up-country" (*malayaaha* or *malainaTTu*) characterizes Tamil descendents of plantation laborers sent from South India to Sri Lanka during the British colonial period. Up-country Tamil political leaders preferred this term as it stresses a common identity rooted in the Up-country region, rather than their (ancestral or current) occupations as estate laborers ("Estate" Tamil)<sup>1</sup> or their Indian origin ("Indian" Tamil) (Bass 2012). While "Jaffna," "Batticaloa," and "Up-country" are regional and subethnic categories (Tamils can be Hindu or Christian (Roman Catholic or Protestant)), "Muslim" is an ethno-religious category. Though there are vast regional, political, religious, class, socioeconomic, and sociolinguistic differences among Sri Lankan Muslims, Muslims at Girls' College and elsewhere in

Sri Lanka prefer the broad designation, "Muslim," as it emphasizes a unified ethno-religious identity. Girls' College teachers ideologically map these social categories onto linguistic forms. Though the lexical and grammatical differences among Jaffna, Batticaloa, Up-country, and Muslim Tamil are extensive (see page E66), as I show, in their metadiscourse teachers ideologically associate these varieties with certain emblematic linguistic features. In the following three examples, I explore how teachers negotiate social hierarchies through their discussions and debate about what constitutes the "best" Tamil speech. I demonstrate that while the ideology that Jaffna Tamil is the most "pure," "original," and "literary" variety (with non-Jaffna teachers countering this view) pervades teachers' metadiscourse, a close examination of the teachers' interactions reveal other relevant ideologies, sociolinguistic hierarchies, and evaluative frameworks.

It is important to point out that my presence in the school and my research topic on what I described as "*tamizh mozhi kalaachcharam*" ("Tamil language culture") prompted Tamil-medium teachers to discuss Tamil sociolinguistic variation and difference more frequently than they might have otherwise. However, from interactions that teachers and students recounted to me, it is clear that such discussions were also common in my absence, in the contexts of pedagogical and administrative issues and other topics pertaining to social and political life. While most of the Tamil-medium teachers' discussions occurred in and about Tamil, their relative English competency, as ideologically linked with class status and global networks (Canagarajah 2005), presented an additional scale of sociolinguistic evaluation (see Example Three). In addition, as an indication of their relative distance from them, Tamil-medium teachers often talked about Sinhalese teachers as though they comprised an undifferentiated block.<sup>2</sup> However, teachers often related hierarchies within the Tamil-medium stream to the Sinhala-medium stream, such as by arguing that either Jaffna or Up-country teachers fit in better with Sinhalese teachers (also see Example Three).

In addition to looking at teachers' metadiscourse, I also analyze the linguistic varieties that the teachers employed. The latter is problematic, as when I was present Tamil-medium teachers often slowed or "normalized" their speech for me. I observed that in their interactions with one another teachers tended to alter their speech depending on the participants involved and other aspects of the context (the location, topic, and presence of overhearers). For example, because of the institutional dominance of Jaffna Tamils at Girls' College and elsewhere, when interacting with Jaffna Tamil teachers, some Up-country Tamil and Muslim teachers slightly adapted their speech to the Jaffna variety (they used Jaffna lexical items or grammatical features, such as the non-dropping of final nasalized consonants). In addition, though they emphasized linguistic differences in their metadiscourse, in their interactions with one another, Up-country Tamil and Muslim teachers' speech often converged to "normalized" Up-country Tamil variety. In Example One, I show how a Jaffna teacher draws on a widely circulating ideology to argue that Jaffna Tamil is the most "pure," "original," and "literary" variety.

### Example One

Rajani is a Jaffna Tamil Hindu commerce teacher and assistant vice principal. She was born in Jaffna, but has lived in Kandy since the early 1980s. Her husband, also from Jaffna, is a retired police officer. Rajani and her husband are caregivers to a six-year-old Muslim neighbor girl, who had been abandoned by her parents and left with her aging grandmother. The weekend before, I spent the day at Rajani's house. I noticed that Rajani, despite insisting that Jaffna Tamil is the "best" in explicit discussions about language, never corrected the little girl when she used features associated with Muslim Tamil, either at home or at school (She attended grade one at Girls' College). Over tea in the canteen (there were no other teachers present), I asked Rajani if she corrects Muslim students when they say "*iikki*," a shortened form of the spoken Tamil verb "to be" (*irukkudu/irukku*) that is emblematically associated with Muslim

**Table 1**  
**"Jaffna is Tamil the Most Pure, Original, and Literary Variety"**

[The use of the emphatic (emph.) is marked. In addition, the instance of a non-rising intonation in an interrogative phrase is underlined.]

Rajani: iiki nalla tamizh ille.	"iiki" isn't good Tamil.
kolokkiyal tamizh, muslim aakkal peesiRa tamizh.	[It's] colloquial Tamil, the spoken Tamil of Muslim people.
viiTTula appaDi peesuvaanga.	They speak that way at home.
skuulla appaDi peesa kuDaadu.	In school [you] shouldn't speak that way.
viiTTu peeccu.	[It's] house speech.
nalla tamizh irukku, esTeeT tamizh irukku, muslim tamizh irukku.	There's good Tamil, Estate Tamil, Muslim Tamil.
yaazhpaana(m) tamizh, nalla tamizh. orijinal tamizh. ilakkiya tamizh.	Jaffna Tamil is good Tamil. Original Tamil. Literary Tamil.
muslim tamizh matta vazhakku.	Muslim Tamil is another style. <sup>4</sup>
vazhakku <u>enna nu teriyuma?</u>	A style, <u>do [you] know what it is?</u>
saadaaraNa peesura tamizh batticaloa, esTeeT, muslim.	The normal spoken Tamil: Batticaloa, Estate, Muslim.
yaazhpaana(m) tamizh daa(n) orijinal tamizh.	[It's] Jaffna Tamil (emph.) that is the original Tamil.

speakers. Rajani does not directly answer my question, but rather responds by explaining that Jaffna Tamil, as opposed to Estate, Muslim, and Batticaloa Tamil, is the "best" Tamil.<sup>3</sup> I present this interaction in Table 1.

In this interaction, Rajani contrasts Jaffna Tamil, which she describes as "good," "original," and "literary," with "colloquial Tamil," "varieties," or "normal spoken Tamil." Here, as consistent with a widely circulating ideology related to the equation of Jaffna Tamil and *centamizh*, Rajani maps the difference between high (*ilakkiya* (literary)) and low (*kochai* (corrupt)) Tamil onto the difference between Jaffna and non-Jaffna varieties: Batticaloa, Estate, and Muslim Tamil. Thus, while Jaffna Tamil corresponds to the literary variety, all other Tamil varieties are simply "colloquial." Rajani's use of "Estate" rather than the widely used term "Up-country" can be interpreted as derogatory, as it associates Up-country Tamils with tea estate labor. Rajani ascribes to a typical diglossic ideology in arguing that Jaffna Tamil, as it is the most literary variety, is appropriate in school, while colloquial varieties are suitable only in the home:

High: *ilakkiya* ("literary") Tamil  
 Jaffna Tamil

Low: *kochai* ("vulgar") Tamil  
 Colloquial Tamil/normal spoken Tamil/  
 varieties/ Batticaloa, Estate, Muslim Tamil  
 Appropriate only in the home

Appropriate in school

At Girls' College, non-Jaffna students frequently commented to me about their difficulty understanding the speech of some Jaffna teachers (inside and outside of class) because of its unfamiliar lexicon, grammar, and intonation (particularly of the science teacher, who had recently transferred from Jaffna). In contrast to other Jaffna teachers, however, Rajani, in interactions with non-Jaffna students and teachers often switched to a variety close to "normalized" Up-country Tamil. As she knew that I had difficulty understanding Jaffna Tamil, in this interaction Rajani speaks "normalized" Up-country Tamil, with the only recognizable Jaffna feature being the use of a non-rising intonation in the interrogative phrase as marked (Suseendirajah 1999).

In this example, Rajani does not directly address my questions about whether or not she corrects Muslim students when they say "*iikki*," but she instead espouses the

superiority of Jaffna Tamil over all other Tamil varieties. It is possible that the non-committal nature of her answer points to her awareness of a discrepancy between a linguistic ideal (that all students use Jaffna Tamil) and the linguistic features that can be realistically corrected in the classroom. In fact, as I show in the final section of the article, while the ideology that Jaffna Tamil is the “best” frequently surfaces in explicit discussions about language, it is enacted in only particular contexts of practice (explicit oratorical performances). Because of the deeply entrenched hierarchy of Jaffna teachers over non-Jaffna teachers in Tamil-medium educational spheres, Rajani and other Jaffna teachers did not have any qualms about discussing how Jaffna Tamil is the “best” in the company of non-Jaffna teachers. Because of their relative lack of power, non-Jaffna teachers did not challenge this view, except in the absence of Jaffna teachers. Thus, even though the hierarchy of Jaffna teachers over non-Jaffna teachers was shifting in teacher demographics and the curriculum, the dominance of Jaffna Tamil was continually reasserted in Tamil-medium discursive space. In Example Two, I show how three non-Jaffna teachers (a Batticaloa Tamil, an Up-country Tamil, and a Muslim), in an interaction that occurred in the absence of any Jaffna teachers, employ various ideologies to argue against the view that Jaffna Tamil is the “best.” However, when one of the teachers points to another’s speech, the conversation quickly takes a different turn, revealing other relevant ideologies and sociolinguistic hierarchies.

### Example Two

One day I went to the canteen with Geetha, an Up-country Tamil Hindu who teaches Tamil and history; Ravi, a Batticaloa Christian who teaches math; and Nabihah, a Muslim who teaches geography. There were several Sinhalese teachers seated at the far end of the table. Without acknowledging them, we sat down at the near end. The teachers quickly started discussing a Tamil-medium administrative matter in Tamil. Nabihah suddenly turned to me and asked if I was having trouble understanding Ravi’s Batticaloa Tamil. The conversation then turned explicitly to language.

Ravi commented that Batticaloa Tamil, and not Jaffna Tamil, is the “best” Tamil, as it is closest to the literary variety. Enacting a similar ideology to Rajani in Example One, his statement assumes that the variety that is closest to the literary variety is the “best.” Geetha, also refuting the view that Jaffna Tamil is the “best,” added that you cannot say that one kind of spoken Tamil is better than another as each has its place in the Tamil language. She then noted that she recently watched a Tamil television talk show broadcast from Tamil Nadu where there was a speaker from Chennai. She said that because his Tamil was so hard to understand (Chennai Tamil is associated with being fast and having Telugu (a Dravidian language spoken in the Indian state of Andhra Pradesh) influence), they had to use a translator, translating from Tamil to Tamil.<sup>5</sup> While Ravi’s statement implies a hierarchized view of Tamil linguistic varieties, Geetha’s initial statement subscribes to a descriptive/neutral view. However, Geetha’s comment about Chennai Tamil brings up the issue of comprehensibility. Geetha may be pointing to the fact that some Tamil varieties are not as widely circulated as others. However, this discourse of comprehensibility can also imply an isolation of certain varieties and their speakers as “other.” By showing that she may evaluate some varieties as lower than others, Geetha’s comment can be interpreted as undermining her earlier statement of linguistic equality. Speaking directly to me, Ravi switches from Tamil to English and reiterates his point that Jaffna Tamil is not the most literary variety and thus not the “best.” I present this interaction in Table 2.

In Jaffna Tamil, the spoken formal command form is different from many other Tamil varieties in that it ends with “oo” rather than “a” (i.e., *vaango* (‘come’) vs. *vaanga*). In line 1, Ravi makes the point that because Jaffna spoken command forms do not correspond to the literary forms (“come”(formal) is “*varungaL*” in literary Tamil), Jaffna Tamil is not proper Tamil. Here, Ravi does not question the ideology that the most literary-like Tamil variety is the “best” but simply replaces Jaffna Tamil with

**Table 2**  
**"Jaffna Tamil Is Not the Best Tamil"**  
 [The use of the emphatic is marked]

1 <b>Ravi:</b> vaango, poongoo. It's not a Tamil word. vaanga is Tamil.	<i>"vaango (come)," "poongoo (go)." It's not a Tamil word. "vaanga (come)" is Tamil.</i>
2 <b>Geetha:</b> vaango, poongoo, irungoo	<i>"vaango, poongoo, irungoo."</i>
3 <b>Ravi:</b> nabihDa tamizh idaviDa vittiyaasoo(m)	Nabiha's Tamil is different than that.
4 <b>Nabiha:</b> muslims ellaa(m) appaDi peesuRadille	Not all Muslims talk like that.
5 <b>Geetha:</b> KaNDi Muslim onDu, akurana muslim onDu, kalheena muslims onDu peesuvaanga, pooRaa, vaaRaa	Kandy Muslims speak one way, Akurana Muslims speak one way, Kalheena Muslims speak one way. <i>"pooRaa, vaaRaa."</i>
6 <b>Nabiha:</b> irubathu irubathi anju pirivu irukkudu muslim bashayila	There are 20 to 25 divisions within the Muslim [Tamil] language.
7 <b>Ravi:</b> oru naaL zakkiramaDattooDa kadaicca neeram nallaa kadaiccaa kaDaisyila "pooRa" enDu keeTTaa enakku viLangalla. piRahu daa(n) viLangiccu. poohappooRingaLaa engiRatu daa(n) pooRaa enDu keeTTuRukka.	One day when I was speaking with Zakkira Madam, she spoke well. At the end, she asked <i>"pooRa?"</i> I didn't understand. Only later (emph.) did [I] understand that she was asking <i>"poohappooRingaLaa"</i> ("are you going to go?") (emph.), by asking <i>"pooRaa?"</i>
8 <b>Nabiha:</b> ave inge vanda piRahu konjam tirundiTTaa. viiTTukku poonaa, pooRaa, vaaRaa enDudaa(n) kadaiikiRadu skuulukku vandaa appaDi ille.  uNmaiyaana tamizh kadaicca engaDa aakkaL sirippaanga. veDDing hovusukku ellaa(m) pooy appaDi peesunaa sirippaanga. avanga ninaikiRadu naanga veeNunnu peesuroonnu.	After she [Zakkira] came here she changed a little. If [she] goes home, <i>"poonaa, pooRaa, vaaRaa"</i> is said (emph.), but when at school it's not like that.  If [we] speak real Tamil our people will laugh. If [you] go to a wedding house and speak like that they will laugh. They will think that we are speaking that way purposefully like that.

Batticaloa Tamil. In line 2, Geetha imitates Jaffna Tamil command forms in a slightly mocking tone. In line 3, Ravi, switching back to Tamil, states, "Nabiha's speech is different than that." While previously the teachers were all in alignment in arguing about why Jaffna Tamil is not the "best," Ravi changes the footing in the conversation by isolating Nabiha's speech.

Taking Ravi's comment as a negative evaluation of her speech, Nabiha responds in line 4 by pointing out that not all Muslims speak like that. In line 5, Geetha, aligning with Nabiha, points out that there are lots of different varieties of Muslim Tamil, naming the varieties spoken in nearby Muslim-majority towns. While still ascribing to what seems to be a descriptive/neutral view of Tamil linguistic variation, she starts to imitate the dropping of finite verb endings in Muslim Tamil. Like her imitation of Jaffna Tamil in line 2, her imitation of Muslim Tamil is in a mocking tone. Thus, as similar to her earlier comment about the Chennai television program, her (mocking) imitations of Muslim and Jaffna Tamil (line 2) show a negative evaluation of certain Tamil varieties, presumably in relation to some kind of widely circulating or unmarked Tamil variety.

In line 7, prompted by Geetha's comment about different varieties of Muslim Tamil in line 5, Ravi tells a story of his interaction with another Muslim teacher, Zakkira, who had recently come to the school from a Muslim-majority town outside of Kandy. Ravi says that Zakkira was speaking well, but at the end of the conversation, she asked *"pooRaa?"* He says that initially he could not understand what she was saying but later realized she was asking, *"poohappooringaLaa"* ("are you going to go?"). By recounting

his interaction with Zakkira, Ravi, like Geetha above, seems to point to the issue of comprehensibility. However, while in the interaction he initially misunderstands Zakkira's language, he is able to figure it out in context. Ravi's story contrasts Zakkira's "speaking well" in school with her subsequent inappropriate use of "poora." Thus, rather than being about Muslim Tamil's incomprehensibility, Ravi's story emphasizes the diglossic view that Muslim Tamil, as a negatively valued variety, is inappropriate in school.

In line 8, Nabihā defends Zakkira by saying that her speech has improved since she first came to Girls' College. She comments that when Zakkira goes home she can say "*pooRaa, poonaa, vaRaa*" (examples of the dropping of finite verb endings), but in school she must not speak that way. She then turns to herself, and says that if she were to speak "*uNmaiyyaaNa*" ('real') Tamil at home her family would laugh, and think that she was speaking that way purposefully, presumably to show off. By stating that Zakkira can speak Muslim varieties at home but not in school, Nabihā substantiates Ravi's view that Muslim Tamil is inappropriate in school. Her comment that Zakkira's speech had "improved" since she first came to Girls' College, links Zakkira's speech not only to her Muslim identity, but also to her place of origin in a town outside of Kandy. The Kandy vs. non-Kandy distinction is also related to class, socioeconomic level, and educational background, as people from small towns and villages outside of Kandy generally have fewer financial resources and less access to quality schools. In contrast to Ravi, Nabihā does not contrast Muslim Tamil to Jaffna or Batticaloa Tamil (as literary-like varieties) but to "real" Tamil, which seems to refer to a "standard"<sup>6</sup> or unmarked variety.<sup>7</sup> At the same time, however, Nabihā also emphasizes the solidarity value of Muslim Tamil in the home, as a counter-legitimate language (see Woolard 1985). Nabihā also points out how she switches in and out of Muslim Tamil and "real" Tamil depending on the social setting (at school vs. at home). Thus, while Ravi strongly associates Muslims with producing Muslim Tamil, Nabihā points out that while preferring to speak Muslim Tamil at home, Muslims are perfectly capable of producing "standard" or unmarked Tamil in school. The most significant linguistic contrast in this interaction is Ravi's use of English in line 1, which has the effect of targeting his statement directly to me. In the rest of the interaction, Ravi, Nabihā, and Geetha all speak "normalized" Up-country Tamil. The lack of internal difference in their speech has the effect of putting them on equal footing, as well as creating some distance between the issues they are describing and their own linguistic practices.

In this interaction, the three teachers draw on multiple ideologies to evaluate Tamil linguistic forms, mapping them onto social categories. Both Ravi and Geetha, as consistent with diglossic models, distinguish speech that is appropriate in school vs. in the home. However, while for Ravi the speech that is appropriate in school is a regional "prestige" (Batticaloa rather than Jaffna Tamil), for Nabihā (and perhaps for Geetha as well), it is an unmarked or "standard" Tamil. While the hierarchy between speakers who can produce the regional "prestige" and those who cannot is immediately related to place of origin; the hierarchy between speakers who can produce an unmarked or "standard" Tamil and those who cannot is related to ethnicity, religion, place of origin, socioeconomic level, class, and educational background. These hierarchies, however, are not necessarily in conflict with one another but, as I show, come to the forefront in different contexts of practice.

In Example Three, I examine an interaction that occurred between Geetha and an Up-country Tamil English teacher, Banu. In this example, Geetha and Banu critique Jaffna Tamils' discrimination against Up-country students in educational contexts. After an interesting turn of events, Banu takes this critique a step further by attempting to subvert the Jaffna/Up-country hierarchy by ideologically mapping it onto the sociopolitical distinction between the LTTE and the Sri Lankan state. This example further demonstrates the complexity in teachers' metadiscourse, in showing how linguistic hierarchies may obtain their value in relation to different evaluative frameworks (Tamil-medium educational spheres vs. wider sociopolitical spheres).

### Example Three

One day I came into the Tamil-medium staff room and found Geetha and Banu discussing the prestigious Colombo boys' private school, Royal College. Having studied in a private English-medium school, Banu was the only Tamil English teacher at Girls' College (the other English teachers were Muslim and Sinhalese). Her lack of competency in literary Tamil genres made Banu feel uneasy in Tamil academic discussions, particularly in the presence of Jaffna teachers. I also knew from another teacher that she had a particularly difficult experience with Jaffna teachers at her prior school. Switching into English, Banu explained to Geetha and me that Jaffna teachers in the Royal College Tamil-medium stream frequently discriminate against Up-country students, telling them that their speech is *"sariyelle"* ('not okay'). Geetha, who usually spoke to me in Tamil, followed her switch into English. Banu commented that rather than discriminating against Up-country students, Jaffna teachers should just go back to Jaffna and work.

Suddenly, Rajani, the assistant vice principal and commerce teacher from Jaffna, entered the room, bringing our conversation to an immediate halt. I thought that Rajani might have heard part of our conversation, so as a "masking" activity to protect Banu and Geetha from a possible negative evaluation, I pointed to my notebook, where I had written down some spoken Jaffna Tamil verb forms from a session with my Tamil teacher the day before. I told Rajani that I had been studying the differences between Up-country and Jaffna Tamil. She glanced at my notebook with interest for a minute before shifting gears and talking to Geetha about an administrative matter.

As soon as Rajani left the room, Banu abruptly grabbed my notebook from across the table and glanced at the Jaffna Tamil verb forms. Meanwhile, Geetha was called away from the staff room by another teacher. With a nervous smile that indicated concern, Banu asked me a series of questions. This interaction is detailed in Table 3a.

Recently, an Up-country Tamil teacher at a prominent private boys' school in Kandy had been arrested on suspicion of LTTE affiliation. Invoking these recent events, in lines 1–5, Banu warns me that if I continue to write Jaffna Tamil, "they" (the Sri Lankan government) will arrest me as LTTE. In line 1, the spoken Jaffna verb forms in my notebook prompt Banu to ask if I am speaking Jaffna Tamil. In my interactions with the Girls' College teachers, I did not speak Jaffna Tamil, but "normalized" Up-country Tamil mixed with various Indian Tamil varieties I had studied in Tamil Nadu. In line 3, she asks me not to write the forms in my notebook. Initially misunderstanding Banu's smile as indicating humor, in line 4 I respond to her in a joking manner, stating, "If you don't see me, that's why." However, her very stern tone in her statement in line 5, indicated to me that she was being serious. Banu's warning is related to my presumed ranking of Jaffna Tamil over Up-country Tamil varieties. Here, she claims that if I speak or write Tamil (which I would if I prefer Jaffna Tamil to other varieties), I will be labeled as LTTE to the government and arrested. Banu's discourse thus directly maps the Jaffna Tamil language onto political orientation, associating it with the LTTE. The conversation continues, as I present in Table 3b.

Table 3a  
*"They Will Put You Inside as an LTTE"*

- 
- 1 **Banu:** What, you are speaking Jaffna Tamil now? You think their Tamil is the best?
  - 2 **Christie:** No, it's from my lesson yesterday.
  - 3 **Banu:** Don't write that. They will put you inside [prison] as an LTTE.
  - 4 **Christie:** They might send me. If you don't see me, that's why.
  - 5 **Banu:** Yes. So don't write that, no?
  - 6 **Christie:** Are you serious?
  - 7 **Banu:** Yes! Yes!
-

**Table 3b**  
**“They Won’t Accept Your Research”**

- 
- 8 **Christie:** But Sinhalese people, do they know the difference between . . . ?
- 9 **Banu:** They know. People who have worked in Jaffna, they know.
- 10 **Christie:** They know?
- 11 **Banu:** Why did you write this?
- 12 **Christie:** For my research. I have to learn how to tell the difference between different Tamil varieties.
- 13 **Banu:** They won’t accept all your research. They will just think that all those things . . .
- 14 **Christie:** Can the Sinhala-medium teachers here identify the difference between Up-country and Jaffna Tamil?
- 15 **Banu:** Yes. Yes. Yes. Because we have Jaffna Tamil speaking people and Up-country Tamil speaking people, they can tell the difference. And most of the Sinhalese know Tamil. They know.
- 16 **Christie:** Do they think Jaffna Tamil is the best?
- 17 **Banu:** No, They don’t like it and they don’t speak it. They speak the way we speak. They like us.
- 18 **Christie:** yes . . .
- 19 **Banu:** They know that we are with them for a long time. So they speak the way we speak, so they very well know the difference between us and them, from the way that we speak they identify it.
- 

In line 8, I start to ask Banu if Sinhalese people can tell the difference between Up-country and Jaffna Tamil. Without even letting me finish the sentence, she replies that they can detect these differences (particularly those who work in Jaffna). In line 11, she explicitly asks me why I wrote these forms in my notebook. When I tell her it was for my research, she comments that the Sri Lankan government will not accept this excuse, thus reiterating her initial warning. In line 14, to clarify her earlier statement, I ask Banu if Sinhala-medium teachers can identify the difference between Up-country and Jaffna Tamil. In lines 15 and 17, Banu says not only that Sinhalese can identify the differences between Jaffna and Up-country Tamil, but that when they learn Tamil, they learn Up-country rather than Jaffna Tamil. In Kandy, many Sinhalese have a passive understanding of Tamil, but usually speak it well only if they have lived in the North or taken extensive Tamil-as-a-second-language classes. Emphasizing the differences between Jaffna and Up-country Tamil through the use of “us” and “them,” in line 19, Banu explains that Sinhalese speak Up-country Tamil because Up-country Tamils (in contrast to Jaffna Tamils) have lived among them for such a long time.

To summarize, the interaction in Example Three began with Banu and Geetha talking about Jaffna discrimination against Up-country students. Banu’s discovery of the Jaffna Tamil verb forms in my notebook prompts her to map the distinction between Jaffna and Up-country Tamil onto the distinction between the LTTE (exclusively Tamil) and the Sri Lankan state (where Up-country Tamils and Sinhalese peacefully coexist):

Variety:	Jaffna Tamil	Up-country Tamil
Social groups who speak it:	Jaffna Tamils	Up-country Tamils and Sinhalese (as a second language)
Political form:	The LTTE (the North)	The Sri Lankan State (the South)

In Examples One and Two, sociolinguistic varieties obtain their value in relation to Tamil-medium spheres (Girls’ College and other Tamil-medium institutions). In Example Three, Banu subverts the Jaffna/Up-country hierarchy by mapping these sociolinguistic forms onto wider sociopolitical formations.

At Girls' College, Up-country Tamil and Muslim teachers tended to have a higher proficiency in English than Jaffna teachers. The fact that this conversation occurs in English presents an extra layer in Geetha and Banu's critique of Jaffna Tamil domination. It shows that they can not only compete with Jaffna Tamils in terms of producing the "best" Tamil, but they can also carry on a conversation with a foreigner in English, a language that is ideologically linked to high class status and access to national and global networks. Also, in drawing on the Up-country/Jaffna Tamil distinction in this interaction, both Banu and Geetha seem to exclude Muslims.

Examples One–Three illustrate the complexity in Tamil-medium teachers' metadiscourse—particularly in terms of the presence of multiple ideologies, sociolinguistic hierarchies, and evaluative frameworks. However, in considering how Girls' College teachers reproduce and contest sociolinguistic hierarchies, it is necessary to ask what the relationship is between the ideologies involved in teachers' metadiscourse and the way that they actually correct and evaluate students' speech in the classroom. Do particular ideologies come to the forefront in some practices but not others? In the following discussion, I show how teachers' ideologies are enacted in subject-area classes, language classes, and oratorical performances.

### Evaluating Students' Linguistic Performances in the Classroom

The way that Girls' College teachers correct and evaluate students on the basis of their speech is related to the sociolinguistic situation of the students. As I discussed above, while there is an equal number of North and East Tamil, Up-country Tamil, and Muslim teachers, the overwhelming majority of students are Up-country Tamils and Muslims. Some of the northern and eastern students came as refugees of Civil War and/or the 2004 Tsunami, but most were born in Kandy to parents from the North and East. It is common for students from all social backgrounds to incorporate Jaffna lexical and grammatical features in their speech (such as "*vaDivu*" rather than "*azhahu*" for beautiful). However, the majority of students speak emergent "normalized" Up-country Tamil varieties.

The following discussion focuses on the grade 10 Tamil-medium class, which was comprised of 47 students (ages 14–16). In Table 4, I present the ethnic, religious, and subethnic makeup of the grade 10 Tamil-medium class. In Table 5, I show the girls' distribution by place of origin.

**Table 4**  
Ethnic, Religious, and Subethnic Makeup of the Girls' College Grade 10 Tamil-Medium Class

<b>Ethnicity</b>		
Tamil 25 (53%)	Muslim 22 (47%)	
<b>Religion</b>		
Hindu 23 (49%)	Christian 2 (4%)	Muslim 22 (47%)
<b>Subethnicity</b>		
Up-country 23 (49%)	North and East 2 (4%)	NA

**Table 5**  
Distribution of the Girls' College Grade 10 Tamil-Medium Class by Place of Origin

Students from Kandy Town = 17 (36%)
Students from towns and villages near Kandy Town = 18 (38%)
Students from other areas = 12 (26%)

As part of my research, I asked my two research assistants (both Up-country Tamil Hindu females) to analyze recordings of the speech of the girls in the grade 10 Tamil-medium class in teacher–student and student–student interactions. Without telling them anything about the class demographics, I asked them if they could identify any girls from the North or East on the basis of their speech. They both said that they could not, but that the most significant linguistic contrast in the class was between Muslim and non-Muslim girls. They identified Muslim students as using “non-normalized” features in their speech such as the shortening of the verb “to be,” the dropping of finite verb endings, and the realization of /s/ as [ʃ].

The two girls in the class with parents from Jaffna were Selvi and Jayanthi. Selvi emphasized her Jaffna identity to other students, particularly in reference to her high class ranking, but Jayanthi preferred not to discuss it. However, both girls in their interactions with teachers and classmates did not speak in a way that was recognizable as Jaffna. It seemed from my interactions with these students that their avoidance of Jaffna features was related to their desire to fit in with other students in the class, with whom they had been studying since grade 6. In addition, as I discussed in Example Three, in the current security climate, it was risky to be identified as Jaffna both within and outside of educational institutions.

In the Tamil-medium stream, the way that students’ linguistic practices were evaluated highly depended on the subject. While in all subjects students were supposed to produce the literary variety in teacher–student interactions, students’ literary Tamil skills were subject to the highest level of scrutiny in Tamil class, where students were required to produce forms of Tamil oratory (recitation, drama, and debate). By contrast, other subjects stressed students’ conceptual understanding of the subject matter over their linguistic performances. At the time of my research, Jaffna Tamil teachers in the secondary-school taught math, science, health science, Hinduism, and commerce (Rajani). When observing these classes, I rarely noticed teachers correcting students on the basis of their speech.

At Girls’ College, the secondary-level Tamil teacher was Geetha, an Up-country Tamil Hindu. Geetha corrected students on their ability to produce and sustain the literary variety in teacher–student classroom interactions and in recitation, drama, and debate. I also noticed that Geetha regularly corrected students for using “non-normalized” features in their spoken Tamil, both inside and outside the immediate context of lessons. As consistent with my research assistant’s evaluation of their speech, the students in the class who Geetha targeted the most were Muslims, particularly girls from Muslim-majority towns and villages outside of Kandy.

For example, one day Geetha was sitting at her desk in the front of the grade 10 Tamil-medium classroom, doing some administrative work before starting class. The students were chatting at their desks. A Muslim girl, using the shortened forms of the spoken verb “to be,” called out to another girl across the classroom: “*Panadol iikkidaa*” (‘Do you have Panadol’)? Geetha then stood up and repeated the question in a mocking tone (similar to her imitations of Jaffna and Muslim Tamil in Example Two), causing several girls in the class to laugh. When the Tamil class was finished, Geetha came and sat next to me in the back of the classroom. In earshot of several Muslim students remaining in the classroom, she referred to the incident, explaining that while Muslim Tamil is “*sari*” (fine) for home, in school Muslim students should speak what she referred to as “*saadaaraNamaaNaa*” (ordinary) Tamil or “*pothuvaaNa*” (usual) Tamil. In this example, Geetha expresses the diglossic view that only “normal” or “usual” Tamil is appropriate in school, but that Muslim Tamil is okay in the home. This practice contrasts sharply with Geetha’s avoidance of this hierarchized view of Tamil linguistic variation in Example Two, which may have been related to the presence of a Muslim teacher in the interaction, her close colleague Nabaha.

In summary, inside and outside the context of lessons, Geetha corrected/targeted students for failing to produce a “standard” or unmarked spoken Tamil (similar to what I identify as “normalized” Up-country spoken Tamil). For Geetha, the produc-

tion of incorrect spoken forms is indexically mapped onto students' ethnicity/religion (Tamil vs. Muslim) and place of origin. In exploring the way that teachers enact ideologies in practice, it is important to consider that way that teachers evaluate students in explicit oratorical performances, as it is in this context where students are expected to produce flawless "literary" Tamil.

At Girls' College, the primary-level Tamil teacher and Tamil-as-a-subject head was Kitana, a Jaffna Tamil Hindu, who was also the most senior Tamil-medium teacher at the school. I did not have a chance to observe any of Kitana's classes, as I spent little time in the primary school. However, on several occasions I observed Kitana auditioning students of all ages for inter-school Tamil oratory competitions in the Tamil-medium staff room. In these auditions, Kitana asked students to recite Tamil poetry in the literary genre. During one of these auditions, Kitana commented to me and the other teachers in the room (Jaffna Tamils and non-Jaffna Tamils) that Up-country students' pronunciation was not as good as that of the Jaffna students. While I could not detect any differences in the speech of Jaffna and non-Jaffna girls, she frequently corrected Up-country Tamil girls for improperly pronouncing the alveolar liquid /zh/ as "l," such as in *"tamizh."* Though this is a widespread pronunciation tendency in Sri Lanka, Kitana and other Jaffna teachers widely associated it with Up-country and Muslim girls. When it came to selecting students to compete in competitions, Kitana invariably selected Jaffna girls. For Kitana, the production of the "best" literary forms was tied to a Jaffna identity.

Though Geetha frequently insisted to me and other non-Jaffna teachers at the school that Jaffna Tamil is not superior to other Tamil varieties, she also frequently selected Jaffna girls for oratorical performances during Tamil lessons. There is a possibility that this was related to the Jaffna girls' formal training in oratory and singing (something more traditionally stressed among Jaffna girls) and not directly tied to their Jaffna identities. In one particular instance, Geetha called on three girls (two Jaffna Tamils and a Muslim) to sing a Tamil Carnatic (a musical tradition from South India) song in class (in the literary genre). When they finished, she asked me to say who sang the best. Not well versed in Carnatic singing, I said that I had no way to judge them. On our way to the Tamil-medium staff room after class she explained that the Muslim girl had not sung as clearly, or as fluently as the others. In this example, the terms "clear" and "fluent" may not correspond to language differences, but rather to level of confidence, knowledge of the song, and enunciation. This particular Muslim girl had studied Carnatic music, but not for as long as the other two girls.

For Geetha, different ways of evaluating linguistic varieties and speakers came to the forefront in different contexts of practice (oratorical performances vs. elsewhere). While she frequently corrected students on their ability to produce literary varieties and unmarked or "standard" forms (inside and outside of lessons), it was only in the context of explicit oratorical performances where she, like Kitana, ideologically linked the production of the "best" literary forms to a Jaffna identity. Here, this association is related less to the linguistic forms that the students employ, as all the girls appeared to employ correct or appropriate literary forms to varying degrees, but to the ideology that Jaffna Tamils produce the "best" literary forms.

### Conclusion

An examination of the incongruities within and between teachers' ideological assertions and practices reveals shifts in the configuration of social inequalities at Girls' College and elsewhere. The variation and complexity in the way that teachers ideologically map linguistic forms onto social differences in their metadiscourses and evaluative practices are consistent with the ongoing hierarchical shifts among Tamil-speaking groups in the post-1983 period. While the distinction between Jaffna and non-Jaffna Tamils is still highly salient at Girls' College, other hierarchies are becoming more prominent as related to ethnicity, religion, class, place of origin, socioeconomic level, and educational level. By contrasting teachers' metadiscourses with their

evaluative practices, it was possible to see that the ideology that Jaffna Tamil is the “best” does not move freely across social space, but is associated with a particular context of practice—explicit oratorical performances (either in the classroom or in inter-school oratorical competitions). As related to the recent power shifts among Tamil-speaking groups, at Girls’ College there is evidence of a shift in language ideological processes—the indexical linkages between a sociolinguistic variety and the linguistic forms associated with it, as mediated by sociocultural, political, and moral orders (Irvine & Gal 2000). Jaffna Tamil is still a highly salient sociolinguistic category, but it is less tied to particular aspects of Jaffna spoken Tamil (such as a non-rising intonation or the non-nasalization of final nasal consonants) than to the idea of producing the “best” Tamil, which is literary Tamil.

I conducted additional research at Girls’ College from June–July 2011, over two years after the end of the Civil War. As exams were in session, I did not have a chance to observe any classes. However, I spent considerable time talking with teachers in the Tamil-medium staff room. In the three years that had passed since I completed my research in 2008, there had been a slight demographic shift in the Tamil-medium stream. As it was now safe to return to Jaffna for the first time in decades, two Jaffna teachers had accepted transfers to Jaffna government schools. In addition, four young teachers had been hired—three Muslims and an Up-country Tamil Hindu. In teachers’ discussions and debates about language in the canteen and the staff-room, they still frequently discussed the sociolinguistic distinction between Jaffna and non-Jaffna speakers. However, their discussions more frequently involved the mapping of linguistic differences onto ethno-religious identity (Muslim vs. non-Muslim) and place of origin (Kandy vs. non-Kandy). Non-Muslim teachers (both North and East and Up-country) were particularly concerned about whether or not the new Muslim teachers spoke correct or appropriate Tamil in the classroom. In the future, I suspect that Jaffna Tamil will maintain some status as a “prestige” variety at Girls’ College and other Tamil-medium schools and streams. However, the ideological link between the category Jaffna and the linguistic forms that speakers actually produce will become even more remote and indeterminate. At the same time, as Up-country Tamils and Muslims continue to rise in prominence in Tamil-medium educational institutions throughout the South, other sociolinguistic distinctions and hierarchies will become more salient, both within and across metadiscourse and practice.

### Notes

1. Currently about 80% of Up-country Tamils still live on tea plantations, with a smaller percentage actually employed on the plantations (Bass 2012).

2. I also suspect that Sinhalese teachers talked about Tamil-medium teachers as an undifferentiated block, but I did not have enough evidence to support this claim.

3. The Madras University Tamil Lexicon transliteration scheme has been widely used for representing “written” Tamil in Roman script. Drawing on Annamalai (1980), in this article I use a modified version of the Madras Tamil Lexicon which captures the wide range of sounds in spoken Tamil (such as the distinction between voiced and voiceless stops and nasalized vowels). Retroflex sounds are represented with capital letters, and the alveolar liquid consonant represented as “zh,” as in “*tamizh*.”

4. Though “*vazhaku*” directly translates as “style,” the meaning is close to the conventional definition of “variety.”

5. Geetha is likely referencing one of several Chennai-based popular comedy shows that poke fun at different Tamil varieties. On these shows, they usually have a guest speaking a widely recognized variety of Tamil (such as Chennai Tamil or Jaffna Tamil) and another speaker translating it into a more “normalized” Tamil. Thus, rather than being a spontaneous occurrence, which she seems to imply, the Tamil to Tamil translation is part of the regular format of these shows.

6. I am referring to the conventional meaning of standard, rather than theorizing the existence of a standard spoken Tamil.

7. This “standard” or unmarked Tamil is similar to what I identify as “normalized” Up-country spoken Tamil.

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