

Lost in translation?

An investigation into Tamil-speaking South Asian British mothers' beliefs, perceptions and practices concerning language learning and features of parent-child interaction within play

Shyamani Hettiarachchi, Language & Communication Science, City University

AIMS

- © To describe the mothers' attitudes, perceptions, views and beliefs concerning the language acquisition process
- © To describe the mothers' attitudes, perceptions, views and beliefs regarding their role within their child's language acquisition process
- © To describe features of mother-child interaction during play

PARTICIPANTS

Four Tamil-speaking South Asian mothers and their pre-school children (Two typical and two atypical language learners)

METHODOLOGY

- © Semi-structured interviews to be audio-taped
- © Observation of mother-child at play

TRANSLATION ISSUES

© **Language-specific concepts**

There was a lack of specific concepts in Tamil making it difficult to translate directly from English to Tamil. The mothers were requested to comment on the questions asked. It was reported that no obvious questions were omitted and that the questions were 'fine'. This may be a reflection of Asian culture as criticism albeit constructive may not always be comfortable. Discussions with interpreters and community leaders were more beneficial.

© **Consistency of interpreters**

There were difficulties with getting a consistent professional interpreter due to financial and time constraints.

© **Consistency of translation**

As more than one interpreter was used, questions regarding consistency of interpretation emerged. Back translation (from English to Tamil) of 10% of the data by a Tamil academic was undertaken to address possible issues of inconsistency.

ENGAGING THE COMMUNITY

The researcher had little engagement with this community in spite of being South Asian. East London was identified as a popular Tamil-speaking area and networks made.

ISSUES OF ACCESS

Access to homes

Political implications: The tensions between Tamil and Sinhala-speaking communities in Sri Lanka have continued for over two decades. The participants, all Tamil-speakers were offering access to their homes to the researcher who is a Sinhala-speaking South Asian. Being introduced through respected Tamil organisations and respected elders within the community and being of mixed-parentage helped with this potentially sensitive situation.

Access to Information: Information sheets were provided in Tamil. The researcher produced an information sheet in English, which was translated by a Tamil-speaking speech therapist and subsequently reviewed by a Tamil academic. The consent form was in a pictorial format to enable understanding. Opportunities to ask questions were provided with a Tamil interpreter present.