



## English Loanwords in Tamil: Fix Illicit Consonant Clusters

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**ABSTRACT:** Loanword adaptation has long proved field as an intriguing object of study. Loanword borrowing often takes place within languages to fill the glossary of the new terminology. The direction of borrowing is primarily linked to the sociolinguistic status of a language in a community. In the scenario of Malaysia, Malay as a national language and English as a global language plays an essential role in the process of loanword adaptation, technologically, culturally and politically. English and Tamil languages have two disparate grammatical elements. Some grammatical rules accepted in English is illicit in Tamil. In particular, consonant clusters in the English language are prohibited in Tamil. Therefore, words borrowed from English into Tamil are subject to choose one of these two contradictory rules, whether adapt the consonant cluster in its authenticity or repairing to satisfy the grammar of the recipient language. The study results show that some borrowed English loan words obey Tamil grammar, while others violate the rules. This raises questions about the adaptation process's possible representational versus phonetic underpinnings. This paper examines the phonetic adaptation of English loanwords in Tamil adaptation, focusing primarily on the process of vowel epenthesis. It finds that the place features of the epenthetic vowel overcome illegal consonant clusters. The paper concludes that the language-specific phonological phenomena are central to this process. Data for this research were obtained from Tamil short stories (2000-2016). Many studies have been conducted to examine loanword adaptation in Malaysian Tamil. However, this study explores the repairing process of phonetic variations in the adapted words.

**Keywords:** Tamil; loanwords; vowel; phonetic; repair.



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## INTRODUCTION

All the world languages are constantly changing and improving their eminence. Naturally, it is an ongoing development process. Languages undergo a process of development like other living

things. By nature, it is a continuous process of evolution. Language cannot maintain its original identity over time ([Aitchison, 2018](#)). In the adaptation process, some borrowed words do not follow the grammatical elements of the recipient languages. It violates the rules of languages and dramatically affects the phonetic system of the recipient language ([Aggarwal, 2012](#)). Cultural differences in a multi-racial society are the leading cause of borrowing, especially among the Tamil community in Malaysia ([Karpagavalli et al., 2021](#); [Venkatraman & Thiruvalluvan, 2021](#)). However, some historical events that led to the foreign occupation of the Tamil nation, India, also caused various loanwords admitted to Tamil brought in to Malaya during the migration of labourers from south India to Malaya late 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century. Indian immigrants began to be brought into Malaya under the British Colonial Office. ([Yaakop, 2010](#)).

Many of the Indian communities in Malaysia have maintained their language and culture. Tamil's position in Malaysia, a multi-racial country, has led to cultural and language sharing ([Abdullah & Leo, 2014](#); [Hemat et al., 2015](#); [Hemat & Heng, 2012](#); [Rahman et al., 2008](#)). The aspirations of globalization are pretty loud, and the younger generation's aspirations to prioritize English in every aspect have seen the launch of English consciously, directly, and unconsciously and indirectly. This appreciation has spread in the daily use of the Tamil language and communication in Malaysia. English loanwords are primarily used in Tamil short stories. A total number of 5455 English words were listed from the short stories collections from 2000-2016. This draw two categories of adaptations. The first category is loanwords modified according to the grammatical rules of the Tamil language. The second category is loanwords translated directly from English into Tamil without further changes that violate the laws of Tamil grammar. It's created boundaries whether speakers have to retain the language element or sacrifice an aspect to give way to the new word. Language speakers usually prefer relatively prominent appearance features and modify them according to the recipient's language needs. However, some speakers want to be loyal to the donor language.

The widespread use of English loanwords in the Tamil community's daily speech, which does not care about authenticity and grammar, challenges language in maintaining its identity. The loanword must be modified to satisfy the recipient's language's grammatical requirements. This causes deletion, epenthesis or replacement of segments in a word ([Kager, 1999](#)). This situation affects the original feature of the donor's language. However, it should adhere to the language requirements to not look foreign.

Typology linguistics creates a universal grammar consistent with all the world's languages. The emergence of universal principles can only become a reality when universal grammar is accepted by all languages ([Kager, 1999](#)). The universal grammar is general to all languages and not limited to specific languages. With this concept in the 1990s, Alan Prince and Paul Smolensky began to put forward new theories in human language in their book, Optimality Theory: Constraint Interaction in generative grammar. This theory is a new theory that emphasizes the constraint-based approach instead of the rule-based theory that has been held by linguists before. The focus of linguists shifted to the new idea, and its followers grew and its widespread use in linguistic studies. This theory acknowledges that marked restrictions do not exist naturally; in fact, they

have been done with the acquisition by a person since childhood ([Bermúdez-Otero & Börjars, 2006](#)). Improvement strategies are fundamental in adapting foreign loanwords (LW) in the recipient's language. Linguists have used several techniques to adjust LW in their native language, including modification or replacing phonemes, adding phonemes, and deleting phonemes. These three strategies help satisfy the recipient's language needs ([Aghagolzadeh & Farazandeh-pour, 2013](#)).

Linguists have already used several studies using three primary strategies in different languages ([Adler, 2006](#); [Chang, 2008](#); [Chen & Xu, 2019](#); [Davis & Kang, 2006](#); [Guo, 1999](#); [Harb, 2015](#); [Kang, 2003](#); [Karim, 2003](#); [Karim & Nassaji, 2013](#); [Kenstowicz, 2010](#); [Kim, 2010](#); [Yip, 1993](#)), are among the studies that discuss the strategies applied in adapting English LW into their respective native languages. The above studies explain three designs to satisfy native language needs: phoneme addition, deletion, and replacement.

Many studies between languages have been carried out exceptionally to deal with the illicit consonant clusters. In his research, ([Karim, 2010](#)) uses a vowel addition strategy in adapting English loanwords into Bengali. The strategic use of this vowel addition is done to ensure that the adaptation of LW does not neglect the authenticity of the language. Bengali does not allow the presence of CC at the front of a word, and loanwords consisting of CC will be simplified according to the phonotactics of vowel addition ([Karim, 2010](#)). When presented with another consonant phoneme, the alveolar consonant phoneme receives the vowel phoneme /ə/ in front of it. The process of adapting LW in its native language lies at ease and is determined by the speakers of the language themselves.

The study, English word-final /s/ in Korean loanword phonology by ([Davis & Kang, 2006](#)), also discusses the addition of vowel phonemes to adapt LW in its language. A vowel is added at the end of a word, which prohibits the consonant phoneme /s/ in the code part. The /s/ phoneme in English has a different duration according to its place of presence, where the presence as a CC phoneme has a lower period when compared to a single existence. This affects the presence of the /s/ phoneme in Korean. This problem is overcome by adding a vowel phoneme at the end of the loanword. This proves that the strategy of vowel addition is a necessity in satisfying the needs of language grammar ([Davis & Cho, 2006](#)).

In Cantonese, the English LW is adapted according to the requirements of the native language by using the same strategy of the addition of vowel phonemes. It is performed after the fricative and affricate phonemes and the majority after the final phoneme liquids. Phoneme additions are made in front, middle and at the end. The vowel addition strategy applied in Bengali and Korean is adding vowels in front or at the end of an LW. In fact, in Cantonese, the technique of adding a phoneme in the middle of a word can be seen.

Thus, it is clear that an improvement strategy is needed in adapting foreign LW into the native language when there is a shortage of phonemes and a ban on foreign phonemes in a speech.

## **METHOD**

([Rose & Demuth, 2006](#)) explains the concept of 'Possible Representational versus Phonetic Underpinning'. This concept is a component of the dispute to select a segment in the output.

According to the phonological aspect, LW is adapted according to the conditions and constraints imposed by the recipient language, which emphasizes phonological representation. On the other hand, some linguists argue that grammatical, phonological components process LW adaptation, and constraints on adaptation are controlled by perception rather than representation. Some linguists say that the process of LW adaptation takes place outside the phonological, grammatical component in terms of perceptions, conditions and language constraints of the recipient (Rose & Demuth, 2006). (Rose & Inkelas, 2011; Silverman, 1996; Yip, 1993), say that the phonology of the recipient language plays a role as a determinant in the adaptation process, and perceptual factors are also taken into account. In this study, the researcher used the strategy presented by (Silverman, 1992) to analyze English loanwords into the Tamil language.

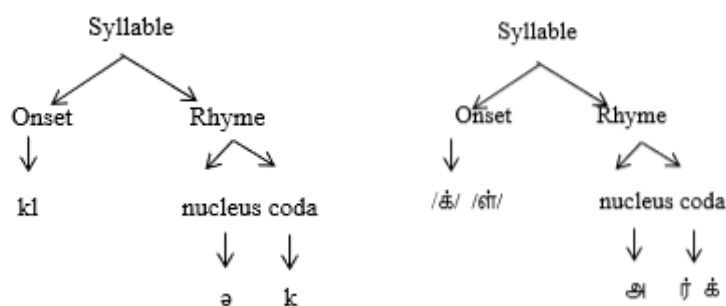
#### Data collection

Loanwords from Tamil short stories were analyzed. English and Malay languages play essential roles in the short stories from 2000-2016. The short stories were written by the local Tamil speaking community, from university students and Tamil short story writers. Raw data is obtained from content analysis, short stories 'peravai kathaikal'. The researcher chose the work of a local writer because it was written by students and writers who are educated and skilled in Tamil. A panel of lecturers evaluated this work before being selected for publication. Short stories from other sources such as newspapers and magazines were not chosen because it was challenging to identify the author's academic background. Meanwhile, the short story 'peravai kathaikal' writers consist of students and well-known writers in Tamil literature in the country.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

English and Tamil languages have two disparate grammatical elements, and some grammatical rules accepted in English is illicit in Tamil. In particular, consonant clusters (CC) in English are prohibited in Tamil. Loan words borrowed from English into Tamil change the word structure. For example, Tamil does not accept CC in its words, but English agrees with that structure in its terms. For example, **Cluster Consonants**

Diagram 1



The above structure is foreign to Tamil. The Tamil syllable structure does not accept the consonant cluster /kl/. Tamil's word structure is affected when the loanword /klærk/ is borrowed without any change. Diagram 1 above shows the onset of CC and the prohibition code in the recipient language. Thus, the speaker of the language makes modifications according to the wishes of his speech by adding vowel phonemes between the sounds of CC at the onset position but not in the coda part. CC code is used without any change in loanword, and it will affect the recipient language structure.

### • Consonant cluster repair

Cross linguistics always opens up space for adding segments, especially when dealing with LW consisting of CC. A vowel phoneme requires the recipient language to separate two prohibited consonant phonemes in the CC state (Bellik, 2018). This situation can be seen in most world languages. The presence of CC can be seen in two different positions, namely on the onset part and the coda in the syllable structure, Tamil. Repair of CC in the onset part in Tamil is done with vowel phonemes as in LW below. (CC is bolded, extra vowels are reduced in size)

#### After bilabial

English	Tamil
a. [prə'fɛsə]	[p <sup>u</sup> rapacar]
[ 'prɪnsəpəl]	[p <sup>i</sup> riŋcipāl]
[ 'plæstɪk ]	[p <sup>i</sup> lāstɪk]
b. [brɛɪk]	[p <sup>i</sup> rēk]
[ 'brɪ:f,keɪs]	[p <sup>i</sup> ripkēs]
[ 'brəʊkə]	[p <sup>u</sup> rōkkar]
c. [frɛɪm]	[p <sup>i</sup> rēm]
[flaɪt ]	[p <sup>i</sup> lait]

Groups (1a), (1b) and (1c) show the addition of the vowels /u /and /i /performed in an effort to separate CC consisting of the voiceless consonant phoneme /p/ along with the gum consonant phonemes /r/ and /l/. Group (1a) shows the borrowing of a front consonant phoneme without any change, and the voiceless consonant is borrowed the same as the input into the recipient language. Group (1b) showed the substitution of sounding phonemes to voiceless, and the third group (1c) showed the substitution of fricative phonemes to plosive.

Such substitution deserves individual attention where when there is a phoneme vacancy in the recipient language, then the phoneme that has a similar value in the recipient language will be replaced. The fricative phoneme /f/ in the language of the donor is a foreign phoneme in Tamil, so it is replaced by a phoneme that has almost the same value in the language of the recipient. The above three groups show similarities in the presence of the unvoiced plosive consonant /p/ at the beginning of LW in the recipient's language, Tamil. The addition of vowel phonemes can be seen in diagram 2 below.

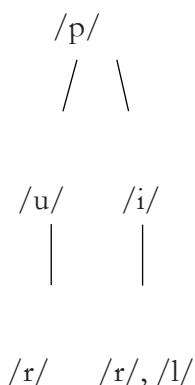


Diagram 2 : Vowel Epenthesis

The loan words above indicate the presence of a consonant cluster in the onset portion consisting of the unvoiced consonant /p/ and followed by the voiced gum consonant phoneme, /r/ or /l /. The epenthesis of vowel phonemes between CC is /i /and /u/. The strategy of adding vowel phonemes between CC is done to adjust LW according to the syllable structure of Tamil, which prohibits the presence of CC phonemes in the onset part.

**\*CConset [Insert-I], DEP-IO, MC >>FC**

The loan word /plastic/ is one of the words that is often used in Peravai Kathaikal's short story. This candidate has a total of four variations in writing. Thus, the constraints \*CConset [Insert-I], DEP-IO, MC >> FC are used to overcome inconsistency in Tamil writing when dealing with LW /plastic/.

Loanword : plastic (plastik) ['plæstɪk]

The adaptation variants for the word /plastic/ in Tamil.

Adaptation : /pilāstɪk/  
/pilāstɪk/  
/pilāstɪk/  
/plāstɪk/

**FC >>MC**

**Fatefulness Constraint (FC)**

DEP –IO - No additional segment

**Markedness Constraint (MC)**

\*CC<sub>onset</sub> [Insert-I] - Insert vowel /i/ in onset position

['plæstɪk]	DEP-IO	*CC <sub>onset</sub> [Insert-I]
a. □ 'plæstɪk		*!
b. p'plāstɪk	*!	

The table above shows the donor language selecting candidate A as the optimal candidate because it satisfies the donor language's requirement, prohibiting the addition of segments in the output. But this candidate violated the restrictions imposed by the recipient's language, Tamil, which prohibits CC's presence in words. On the other hand, Candidate B complied with the constraints of signifying while disobeying the constraints of loyalty that existed at the hierarchy's highest. So DEP-IO, \*CC<sub>onset</sub> [Insert-I], FC >> MC suggest / 'plæstik / as the optimal candidate.

MC >>FC

['plæstik]	*CC <sub>onset</sub> [Insert-I]	DEP-IO
a. 'plæstik	*!	
b. p̄lāst̄ik		*!

The above tableau, which places the constraint of signification at a high level, selects candidate B as the optimal candidate. This situation indicates a discrepancy between the donor's language and the receiver's language. As a speaker of the recipient language, it is the speaker's responsibility to ensure the selection of the candidate satisfies the language requirements of the recipient. Thus, / p̄lāst̄ik / was chosen as the optimal candidate.

\*CC<sub>onset</sub> [Insert-I], DEP-IO, MC >>FC

All words that have the presence of a prohibition consonant at the beginning of the word can be modified according to the constraint.

\*\*CC<sub>onset</sub> [Insert-I], DEP-IO, MC >>FC

plastic	'plastik	p̄lāst̄ik	p̄lāst̄ik
please	plēz	plīs	p̄līs
friend	frend	preṇṭu	p̄reṇṭu

The use of constraints to overcome the prohibition of CC in a language can also be seen in other studies dealing with English loanwords. (Karim, 2010), in his research, used the constraint \*CCONS >> SYLLABLE CONTACT, MAX-IO >> CONTIG-IO >> DEP-IO to adapt English loanwords in Bengali. The ban imposed by the native language on the presence of CC resulted in \*CCONS being placed at the high hierarchy and DEP-IO, which prohibited the addition of phonemes at the lower ranking. This is because the prohibition suggested by the language of the donor can be violated minimally.

## CONCLUSION

The strategy of phoneme epenthesis in loan words is widely in use. It is one of the inevitable elements in language speakers who have different native grammatical systems. This epenthesis strategy helps the language speaker adapt foreign words according to the grammatical

requirements, especially when dealing with illicit consonant clusters. It also helps so that foreign words do not look awkward in a language. Featural modifications is an improvement strategy used to overcome the problem of the prohibition on the presence of consonant clusters phonemes in certain parts of a word. Usually, the presence of prohibition consonant clusters causes a vowel phoneme insertion to be performed. This is because the orthographies of Tamil and English are different, which leads to the occurrence of consonant clusters phoneme voids in Tamil. The recipient language usually chooses a remedial measure of inserting vowels in such cases.

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