

RHODE ISLAND COLLEGE

M.Ed. In TESL Program Language Group Specific Informational Reports

Produced by Graduate Students in the M.Ed. In TESL Program
In the Feinstein School of Education and Human Development

Language Group: Malayalam
Author: Tina Clarke

Program Contact Person: Nancy Cloud (ncloud@ric.edu)

The Language Malayalam

Tina Clarke, TESL 539

Summer I, 2011

- Malayalam is an Indian language.
- It is spoken by 35.9 million people.
- It is one of 22 official languages in India.
- It is also spoken by Indian people in the Middle East, North America, Malaysia, Singapore, Australia and Europe.



Malayalam History and Facts

- ◆ Malayalam is an ancient language derived from Sanscrit.
- ◆ 80% of today's Malayalam words are pure Sanscrit.
- ◆ Malayalam is without diglossia. This means that the spoken language does not differ from the written variant.
- ◆ The word Malayalam is formed from two words. Mala meaning “mountain” and alam meaning “region”.

Evolution of Malayalam

- **Karintamil (3100BCE-100BCE):** this form of the language was found in writing from Kulasekhara Alwar to Perumal Thirumozhi (who was considered a Saint). Sanscrit had no influenced the language yet.
- **Old Mayalam (100BCE-325CE):** Mayalam was influenced by Sanscrit. Verbs were now conjugated according to gender and number.
- **Middle Malayalam (325CE-1425 CE):** Traces of adjuncts and verbs in the language have disappeared by this time.
- **Modern Malayalam (1425CE onwards):** Malayalam establishes itself as it's own language.



Malayalam Grammar

- ❖ Malayalam script has 53 letters including 16 vowels and 37 consonants.
- ❖ Malayalam has a canonical word order of SOV (subject-object-verb). Both adjectives and possessive pronouns precede the nouns they modify.
- ❖ Malayalam has 6 or 7 grammatical cases.



Malayalam Alphabet

- All consonants have an inherent vowel. Diacritics (symbols), are used to change the inherent vowel.
- When they appear at the beginning of a syllable, vowels are written as independent letters.
- When certain consonants occur together, special symbols are used which combine the essential parts of each letter.

Sample of Vowel diacritics with ka

ക	കാ	കി	കീ	കു / കൂ	കു / കൂ
ka	kā	ki	kī	ku	kū
കൃ / ക്ര	കെ	കേ	കൈ	കൊ	കോ
kr,	ke	kē	kai	ko	kō
കൗ	കം	കഃ	ക് / ക്		
kau	kam	kah	k		

Malayalam Phonemes

Malayalam is influenced by the language of Sanscrit. Because of this Malayalam has a large set of distinctive phonemes in it's inventory.

The consonant inventory has 38 phonemes.
The vowel inventory has seven phonemes.

The Malayalam language has many nasal articulations in it.

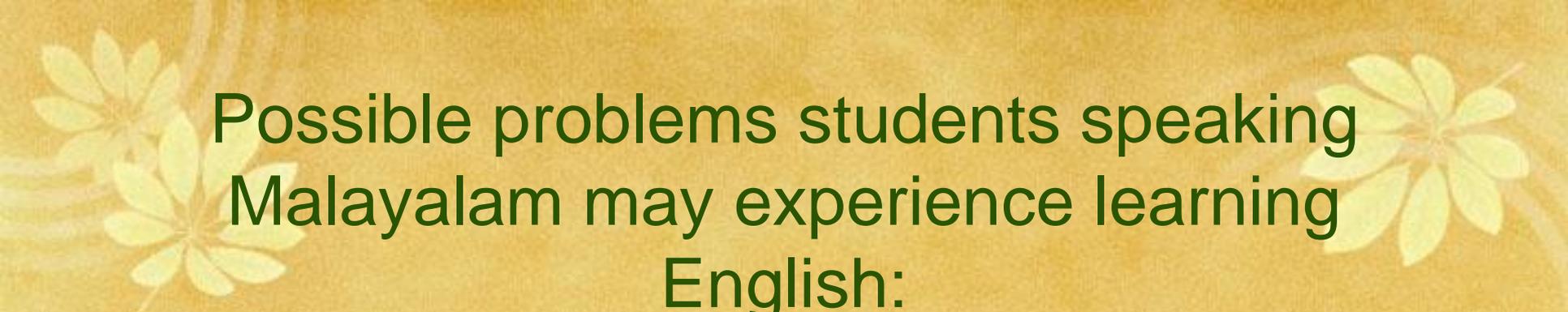
It also has trills in it's language as well.



Malayalam Morphology

- The syntactic and semantic roles played by nominal expressions in the language are expressed mainly by case suffixes and postpositions, rather than by word order.
- Prefixes and prepositions are unattested in the language.
- The Malayalam case system is comprised of nominative, accusative, dative, genitive, locative, instrumental, vocative and sociative.
- Verbs inflect tense (past, present and future), aspect (perfective, imperfective, and progressive), mood (indicative, interrogative, imperative, conditional, operative, debitive, and potential), voice (active, passive), and valency change (causative, passive).





Possible problems students speaking Malayalam may experience learning English:

There are many factors which could be confusing for a person learning English when their L1 is Malayalam.

Because Malayalam has a canonical word order of SOV (subject-object-verb), Students would have trouble ordering their words correctly in sentences.

Additional Problems learning English as L2:

Because all Malayalam consonants have an inherent vowel, students learning L2 English might have trouble spelling words and adding vowels after consonants.

Students would have trouble with vowels occurring at the beginning of words, as in Malayalam the vowels would then stand alone.

Students may have trouble with punctuation, as they use many symbols that look like punctuation to change their letters and add to them.





Examples of possible L1 (Malayalam) to L2 (English) mistakes:

English: The boy whom you saw yesterday is my brother.

Malayalam: Yesterday you saw a boy that was my brother.

English: One who eats salt shall drink water.

Malayalam: One who eating salt, he will drink water.

In Malayalam, the word order is not as rigid as it is in English. Malayalam students learning English may form English sentences in the syntactic framework of Malayalam.



Cultural Faux pas

Here are a list of Cultural faux-pas that could effect teaching and learning when dealing with an Indian student:

- ❖ Do not point at or whistle at an Indian student to gain their attention, it is considered rude.
- ❖ Do not stand with your hands on your hips when speaking to an Indian student, it is considered aggressive and rude.
- ❖ Do not talk too loudly to an Indian student as it is also considered to be rude.



Additional Important Indian Cultural Information:

- ❖ Women are considered the cooks of the home and usually are expected to remain in the kitchen.
- ❖ Even the slightest touch between a male and a female can be considered a sexual connotation.
- ❖ Do not comment on personal appearance or clothes in a negative fashion.
- ❖ Your attire signals your status. Exposing flesh suggest you could be poor or flaunting. Tight clothes are considered shameless.



Resources:

Internet Sites

Absolute Astronomy. (2011). Malayalam language. *Absolute Astronomy*. Retrieved from: http://www.absoluteastronomy.com/topics/Malayalam_language

Malayalam language. (2011). In Wikipedia. Retrieved from: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Malayalam_language

Opentopia. (n.d.). What is Malayalam language? Retrieved from: http://encycl.opentopia.com/term/Malayalam_language

School of knowledge. (2006). Indian etiquette. *A to Z of manners and etiquette*. Retrieved from: <http://www.a-to-z-of-manners-and-etiquette.com/indian-etiquette.html>

UCLA: Language Materials Project. (n.d.) Malayalam language. *UCLA language materials project. Teaching resources for less commonly taught languages*. Retrieved from: <http://lmp.ucla.edu/Search.aspx?doBasicSearch=true>

Images

Ager, S. (2011). Omniglot : the online encyclopedia of writing systems & languages. Retrieved from: <http://www.omniglot/writing/malayalam.htm>



M.Ed. in TESL Program
Nancy Cloud, Director
Educational Studies Department
Rhode Island College, HBS 206 #5
600 Mt. Pleasant Avenue
Providence, RI 02908
Phone (401) 456-8789
Fax (401) 456-8284
ncloud@ric.edu

The M.Ed. in TESL Program at Rhode Island College
is Nationally Recognized by TESOL and NCATE



REACH
INSPIRE
CONNECT