

Voiceless Heroines: Use of Dubbed Voices in Tamil Movies*

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Abstract

Scholars have argued that sound in films has not been given much theoretical attention. Without understanding the use of sound in films, a comprehensive knowledge of the meaning and ideology of movies is not possible. This paper explores how heroines' voices are presented in Tamil movies and provides empirical evidence about gender inequality in the aural practices of Tamil movies. The data for this study came from a content analysis of 40 Tamil movies produced in India (1961–2012), 8 websites related to voice dubbing in Tamil movies, and 4 YouTube videos. The term “dubbed voice” refers to the practice of using a voice-actor or dubbing artist to deliver the dialogue while someone else acts in the movie. In Tamil movies, this trend has been common since the 1980s among female actors in lead roles but not among lead male actors. Even though the inability to speak Tamil is one of the reasons for this practice, it does not explain why female stars mostly use a dubbed voice. The male actors—including non-native speakers—often use their own voice. The use of a few select dubbing artists to lend their voices to heroines limits the type of female voices heard (from lead roles) in Tamil movies and narrowly defines the types of women's voices that are associated with someone who is attractive or good. Therefore, Tamil movies are limiting not only the looks that are showcased on the screen but also the female voices heard in these movies.

Key words

dubbing, objectification, sexualization, voice artist

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Introduction

I was watching an MGR¹ movie from the sixties when my friend walked in. Even before she looked at the screen, she asked, “Saroja Devi² is it?” “Yes, how do you know?” I asked. “Well, I heard her voice as I was walking in,” she said. While we continued watching the movie, she added, “this is a thing of the past, now they all sound alike.”

In Tamil cinema, there has been a trend in using dubbed voices for actresses in lead roles since the 1980s. Even though this has been discussed widely in popular literature, a detailed academic analysis on the way female voices are used in Tamil cinema is rare. Silverman (1988) and Greene (2009) have highlighted the fact that the sound regime in films has not received enough theoretical or empirical attention. Without a serious analysis of how sounds are used in movies (which may include background music, as well as what is spoken or produced by the actor/actress on the screen, and narration) one will not be able to understand a film’s meaning and ideology—because a film is a medium that uses both sound and vision (Silverman, 1988). Similarly, Greene (2009) in her conclusion explained that “sound, and particularly the recorded voice, is just as important as the visual for carrying a film’s meaning” (p. 73). The convention of sound recordings is very important in contrasting certain subject positions in films, similar to the conventions of camera use and framing (Greene, 2009).

Silverman (1988) explained that there is a sexual difference in the sound regime in cinema and that the female voice is also held to normative representations and functions like the female body. Greene (2009) in her study found that,

The manner in which a voice is recorded and given spatial characteristics and reverberation in the reproduction of that sound can allow a character to embody a space more fully. In general, female characters have been denied this embodiment [...]. (p. 73)

¹ MGR or M.G. Ramachandran (1917–1987) was a very popular star in the Tamil movie industry in the 1950s to 1970s. He was elected as the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu for three terms from 1977 to 1987.

² Saroja Devi was a very popular heroine in the 1960s and played the lead role with MGR in many movies.

Female bodies in films on the other hand, have received much attention among feminist film scholars. Many researchers have shown that there is a clear bias in how male and female bodies are presented on the screen (Greene, 2009). Studies have plainly identified that female bodies are presented for the male gaze in movies. This has been documented not only for Hollywood movies but also for movies produced in India (Derne & Jadwin, 2000; Mulvey, 1975; Tere, 2012). Similarly many studies have discussed how female bodies have been sexualized and objectified in movies (Karupiah, 2015; Pennell & Behm-Morawitz, 2015; Vandenbosch & Eggermont, 2015). Following Greene (2009) and Silverman's (1988) argument, it can be concluded that these studies have a visual bias and focus mainly on the images that are shown in the movies. A similar bias has been identified in studies related to other audio-visual media, such as advertisements (Pedelty & Kuecker, 2014).

The sexual difference in the sound regime of the cinema and the presentation of female voices has not been explored in many studies, particularly with respect to South Asian movies. This paper, therefore, explores how the female voice is presented in Tamil movies and whether the voice is presented in a similar manner as the female body, namely, to conform to normative representations. This paper particularly focuses on the use of dubbed voices among female actors in the lead roles in Tamil movies and confirms how such techniques are used to restrict the female voice in those movies. This study provides empirical evidence about how gender inequality in cinema is maintained not only through visual but also through aural practices. It has also identified some points of departure for further exploration of the use of sound in cinema, particularly focusing on Tamil or other South Asian cinema that has its own unique traditions and techniques. This study also contributes to the exploration of the use of sound in cinema, which is scarce in feminist media studies.

Tamil Movies: History and Development

Tamil movies in this study refers to movies produced in Tamil Nadu, India. Tamil cinema began in the early 20th century together with Hindi and Bengali cinema. Madras (now Chennai) became the center of South Indian cinema, which included Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, and Kannada cinema (Velayutham, 2008). While these four cinemas seem distinct from each

other, the boundaries between them are rather porous. Stories, actors, actresses, and technicians often move from one type of cinema to another or are used simultaneously in different languages (see Nakassis, 2015). Since the early years of the Tamil cinema to date, most heroines have worked in more than one South Indian language. Some have also acted in Hindi movies.

Tamil cinema moved from movies to talkies in the early 1930s. Movies in the early stages featured mythology, social issues, and nationalistic ideas. There were also some subaltern issues highlighted in these movies. The post-independence period saw a huge number of movies promoting, and influenced by Dravidian politics. Tamil cinema helped the articulation of the Dravidian identity and Tamil nationalism. This had such a strong impact on Tamil Nadu politics that almost all Chief Ministers in Tamil Nadu from the late 1960s to 2016 were involved in Tamil cinema (see Nakassis, 2015 and Velayutham, 2008 for a detailed discussion on this).

Tamil movies have always centered on the hero. On the other hand, the roles and portrayal of the heroines have gone through some changes in recent years. Many movies during the post-independence period focused on the notion of Tamil femininity, which emphasized *karpu* (chastity and purity). The heroines were portrayed as traditional female archetypes and gave great emphasis to motherhood and the role of a Tamil mother (Lakshmi, 2008). The 1970s marked many changes in the role of the heroines. Their portrayal as pleasurable objects for the male gaze became more prominent, while maintaining some elements of traditional femininity (see Chinniah, 2008). At the same time, this period produced many movies that showed women who do not conform to the traditional norms of femininity and the issues faced by women in an urbanizing Tamil Nadu (Chinniah, 2008). In contemporary movies, even though heroines are objectified and presented for the male gaze, the emphasis on traditional femininity is still evident (Karupiah, 2016).

Tamil Movies and Dubbed Voices

In most Tamil movies, dialogues are not recorded during the filming process but are re-recorded after the filming process. Most songs in contemporary Tamil movies are sung by playback singers, and actors (male and female) usually lip-sync these songs. There are songs that *are* sung by the

actors themselves but the number is negligible. In the Tamil movie industry, playback singers have been professional musicians and public celebrities since the 1950s (Weidman, 2014). They have a strong fan base and are acknowledged in the movies. In addition, they are also known through their shows and public appearances in concerts. The same cannot be said about the voice-actors or dubbing artists. Even though their names are acknowledged in the movies,³ they are not considered celebrities.

The re-recording of the dialogue in Tamil movies after the shooting of the scenes is often done to maintain the quality of the sound recorded. The re-recording process may use the voice of the actor who played the role, or the voice of a dubbing artist. Dubbing is commonly used to replace the voices of actors speaking a foreign language, but in Indian movies, and particularly in South Indian movies (which includes Tamil movies), dubbing⁴ (by either the actor or a voice-actor) is often used in the original production.

Methods

Data for this study came from two sources. First was a content analysis of 40 Tamil movies produced between 1961 and the first half of 2012. Here, only movies produced in Tamil were selected. They were chosen using a simple random sampling method. A sampling frame with more than 4,500 films was created, based on searches using five different Internet search engines. In the content analysis, the researcher and another coder identified if the hero and the heroine used their own voice or used a dubbed voice in the movies. Because the names of the dubbing artists and the characters are not specifically identified in the opening credits, some level

³ Most Tamil movies have opening credits unlike most Hollywood movies, in which a list of playback singers and dubbing artists are listed. Even though, it is not specified which song belongs to which singer, viewers know the singers because they are familiar with their voices or from the names listed in the cassette, CDs, or more recently the mp3s. Similarly, the names of dubbing artists are listed but not according to the actors who have used their voices. Dubbing artists however, are not as well-known as the singers; hence, viewers may not know the voice behind the characters.

⁴ The term of dubbing is used in this paper because it is the term commonly used in the Tamil movie industry and by viewers as compared to post-dubbing. Moreover, the terms of dubbing artists and voice-actors are used interchangeably.

of judgment and knowledge about the actors, dubbing artists, and the Tamil movie industry is involved. The second set of data is from the content analysis of eight websites, namely, six news articles, a blog entry (including 60 comments left by readers), and a forum discussion. These websites were analyzed to explore how the issue of voice dubbing is discussed in the popular media and by viewers. It allowed the researcher to explore how some viewers felt about the practice of dubbing in Tamil movies. Phrases such as “Tamil dubbing artists,” “Tamil voice-actor,” “Tamil dubbing artist blog,” “Tamil dubbing artists forum,” and “voice Tamil heroines” were used in Google search to identify these websites. Only the websites on the first page of the search were used in this study. In addition, four YouTube videos were also analyzed. All these videos were uploaded by the channel that produced them. These videos are interviews of dubbing artists: Deepa Venkat, Sreeja Ravi, and Savitha Reddy. Table 1 provides the details of the search and the number included in, and excluded from, the content analysis.

Table 1.
Search for Websites

Search phrase	Tamil dubbing artists		Tamil voice-actor	Tamil dubbing artist blog'	Voice Tamil heroines'	Tamil dubbing artist forum
Search website	Google	YouTube	Google	Google	Google	Google
Number of search results	6	20	10	9	9	10
Exclusion	5	16	3	7	8	9
Inclusion	1	4	3	2	1	1

For the Google searches, all Wikipedia entries were excluded. In addition, websites related to dubbing of other Indian languages and dubbing of movies in other languages were excluded. Websites with advertisements for or about dubbing artists were also excluded. Finally, some websites were excluded because they were irrelevant to the study. For the search on YouTube, only four videos by popular female dubbing artists were analyzed.

In this phase of content analysis, the researcher identified the names of dubbing artists and actresses who used voice dubbing. This included the names of the movies where dubbed voices were used. Other than that, the

researcher also identified the reasons given for the use of dubbed voices. In addition, the content analysis looked at various issues related to the use of dubbed voices in Tamil movies, which were highlighted on these websites. These issues were categorized under various themes: reasons for using the dubbed voice, bias in the use of the dubbed voice, and lack of authenticity.

Content Analysis of the Movies

When exploring the use of dubbed voices in Tamil movies among actors in the lead roles between the 1960s and 2012, there is an overwhelming trend since the 1980s for heroines to use dubbed voices. In the 1960s and 1970s, most heroines used their own voices for delivering their dialogue. However, after the 1980s, female lead actors in 25 (out of 39 movies) used dubbed voices (see Appendix A) including three actresses who *are* able to speak in Tamil.

The trend is very different for male actors in the lead roles. All actors in the analyzed movies, except for Mohan and Sudhakar, used their own voices. The use of voice dubbing by Mohan is a well-known fact in the Tamil cinema industry. Throughout Mohan's career, S. N. Surendar was *his* voice for 75 of Mohan's movies (Kumar, 2010) such as *Mouna Ragam* (1986) and *Udhaya Geetham* (1985). It can be concluded from popular media that, apart from a few exceptions, most heroes use their own voice for their dialogue. A few actors in the lead roles, (such as Prabhu Deva in *Kadhalan*, 1994, Minsara Kanavu, 1999, and Shyam in *12B*, 2001) used dubbed voice in a few movies in the early years of their careers, but generally, voice dubbing is very uncommon for heroes. Mohan's use of a dubbed voice is a unique case in Tamil cinema. Furthermore, many actors in lead roles use their own voices in their movies even though their mother tongue is not Tamil (such as Rajni Kanth, Mammooty, and Prakash Raj).

In terms of the quality of the voices, because most heroes use their own voice, there is a variety of voices heard from male heroes. In contrast, there are only a few types of voices heard from the heroines (portrayed as being the most beautiful, youthful, feminine, attractive, and courted) because of the use of dubbed voices. Most voices used for heroines are soft, mellifluous, and childlike. The voices are generally high pitched and low in volume. Female voices with high volume are only heard from actresses in

negative roles. Similarly, when an actress who uses a dubbed voice takes a supporting role, the type of voice used for her can be changed. For example, when Nagma acted in a supporting role in the movie *Citizen* (2001) as a serious, tough Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) officer, she was given a hoarse voice. Many criticized this and felt that she sounded like a man (Blogeswari, 2007). Nagma also expressed her disappointment in the use of such a voice (“In love with the big screen,” 2001). A voice like that was never used for her when she had lead roles in the 1990s. This implies that a more manly voice was used to portray her in a serious role, but for lead roles when she was portrayed as the love interest of the hero, a more feminine voice was used. Most male actors (such as Prakash Raj, Rajni Kanth, Mammooty, and Kamal Hasan) use their own voice for all the roles they play, so the male voice does not have to fit into a particular type to be considered suitable for a hero. Their voice remains the same but the tone, modulation, and slang are changed according to the character they play.

The modulation and volume of the heroines’ voices change according to the character played, type of scene, and the emotions being expressed. Heroines’ voices tend to have more modulation because they are often shown to express many different types of emotions when compared to the heroes. Heroes are often portrayed as hyper-masculine characters i.e., characters with extraordinary physical strength, who use high levels of violence and aggression and are more subtle in the expression of emotions.

Content Analysis of Websites

The content analysis shows that a few select dubbing artists such as Anuradha, Deepa Venkat, Savitha Reddy, Sreeja Ravi, Durga Sunderajan, and Chinmayi have been used to give voice to many heroines since the 1980s. In addition, there were also instances where Tamil-speaking heroines provided voices to other actresses (either for their contemporaries or after they have stopped acting in lead roles). Some examples of actresses who have done dubbing are Revathi, Suhasini, Saritha, and Banupriya.

The main reason for the use of dubbing artists for heroines in Tamil movies is that many actresses in the lead roles are not able to speak Tamil. They come from Mumbai or other parts of India (e.g., Tamanna, Genelia, and Aishwarya Rai) or outside of India (e.g., Amy Jackson). Therefore, di-

rectors use dubbing artists to give voice and emotion to the dialogue.

It means that during a dialogue shot, the usual imports from Mumbai like Payal Agarwals, Pooja Khandelwals, and the Neha Mehtas will say 1-2-3 or a-b-c-d if they are convent educated, their voices are later dubbed usually by Savitha Reddy, Priya, or Renuka Kadhir. (Blogeswari,⁵ 2007, para 3)

Furthermore, the blogger also highlighted that this method allows actresses who are not able to speak Tamil to speak gibberish or say something like ‘a, b, c, d’ during the shooting (without having to remember the lines in a language they do not understand), and the actual lines can be recorded during the dubbing process by the dubbing artist.

Why can’t they get their heroines to learn their lines by heart prior to the shoot so that it does not look bad on screen when dubbed later? The heroines’ dubbing looks awful on screen with lips saying a-b-c-d and voice saying “*enna mannichuddungaaa* [I am sorry] [...]”, doesn’t it? (Blogeswari, 2007, para 9)

As voice recording in Tamil cinema is not done while shooting, some have argued that it would be more cost effective to pay a dubbing artist to dub the lines in a movie rather than getting the actress to do it herself.

One other reason for voice dubbing, is budget. Why would [a] producer pay \$\$\$\$\$\$\$ to [S]imran [a popular actress in the 1990s] for 3 days call-sheet for voice dubbing her entire scenes for the movie when he can get [an] “old” actress or a “dubbing” lady whom he can get cheaper :-) (Unmai in “Why are they given dubbing voice,” n.d.)

While cost may be an important reason to use a dubbed voice, it still

⁵ Blogeswari (both her display name and the title of the blog) does not give much information about herself in her blog except that she is from Gummudippoondi, Tamil Nadu. Her blog includes various issues in everyday life but has a large number of entries related to movies, and particularly Tamil movies. She has been blogging for more than 10 years and has 378 followers.

does not explain why only female actors' voices are dubbed. Generally, male actors in the lead role earn much more than female actors.⁶ Therefore, if money is the main reason, then using male dubbed voices would bring bigger savings to the moviemaker. However, moviemakers are willing to spend large amounts of money to ensure male actors act and dub their own voices, and this shows the importance given to the need to maintain the uniqueness and authenticity of the male actors' acting. This is not seen as imperative for female actors in the lead roles. Other websites provided some information regarding the low salary received by dubbing artists.

They earn hardly one percent of the salary of the stars that they speak for. In fact, there is minimal recognition and a non-existent platform since there are no categories to award them, except for those given by the State government. ("Dubbing artists salary in Tamil Film Industry," 2013, para 2)

Similar views were expressed by Lakshmi (2009). A few websites also highlighted the lack of recognition received by dubbing artists. Some websites discussed the bias in the use of dubbing artists for the heroine's role but rarely for the hero's role. Actor Mohan has been identified as the exception. Shakthi in "Why are they given dubbing voice," (n.d.), for example, questioned this practice:

Now, [w]hy is this discrepancy for [the] actress alone? How would [you] feel if, Arvindswamy gave voice for Parthiban or if Kamal Hassan gave voice for Vijayakanth? But that is exactly what happens when it comes to actresses. Maybe "Knowing or not knowing [T]amizh is the question here" :-)

A similar view was documented in Padmanabhan's (2014, para 9) article.

⁶ It has been reported that Vijay, a leading hero since the 1990s received ₹300 million (USD 4.50 million) for his movie *Puli* (2015) second only to Superstar Rajni Kanth, the highest paid actor in Tamil cinema. Vijay's contemporaries were reported to earn between ₹150 to ₹220 million (USD 2.25 - 3.30 million) (Upadhyaya, 2015). Heroines, however, earn almost one tenth of these actors' salary (Indiaglitz, 2015).

Tamil heroes prefer to speak their lines, points out Chetan [a male dubbing artists who dubs for villains and supporting characters]. Of course, no one can dub for actors with distinctive voices and modulation. Comedians voice-act for themselves, and fill tracks during dubbing.

While these websites question the bias in the use of dubbing voices, these websites do not give reasons as to why only female actors in the lead role use a dubbing voice but discuss how some audiences felt about the use of dubbed voices by leading heroines. One of the main issues expressed in these websites about the use of a dubbed voice is the lack of authenticity in acting and the loss of the actress's uniqueness.

When actresses use their own voices, there is an authenticity that is otherwise not present. So, when a character in a film is being portrayed visually, by an actress, and audibly, by a voice artist, it seems only fair that any accolades or credit should be split between the two. (Raveend, 2011, para 6)

In addition, actresses who do not understand Tamil are sometimes unable to give the correct expression or body language according to the dialogue in the movie. In situations like this, the dubbing artists are expected to improvise their dubbing to accommodate these shortcomings. Savitha Reddy and Sreeja Ravi (dubbing artists) recalled incidences where they had to make adjustments to the dialogue to suit the acting (or non-acting) of actresses who do not understand Tamil in their interviews with IndiaGlitz Tamil Movies (2012) and PuthuYugamTV (2014), respectively. Their experiences illustrated that voice-actors put much effort into synchronizing the sound with the movement of the actresses' lips. Savitha Reddy explained:

Mostly, [most] Bombay heroines do not know Tamil when acting with a comedy actor, usually the comedy actor would tease [or make a comment about the heroine], the heroine does not react because she does not understand the language [what was said by the comedian]. In scenes like this, if only her profile is shown, I would give a "counter" [comeback] dialogue to Santanam's [a

comedian] dialogue. So everyone will laugh in the dubbing theater and the technician would say, “Madam, madam, let’s keep the dialogue.” So even in places where the heroine does not say anything, I would add “counters” and sometimes Santanam would add more “counters” [comebacks] during his dubbing process. So I do much improvisation on comedy during dubbing. I have done much improvisation in the movie OKOK [*Oru Kal, Oru Kannadi*, 2012] [...] The director appreciated this and allowed me to do this, as long as it was funny. (IndiaGlitz Tamil Movies, 2014, 5:37)

Sreeja Ravi prefers to be called a voice-actor rather than a dubbing artist because she felt that the process of dubbing implies that one just repeats what is said by the actor—but in actual production, their role is much more than that. They not only repeat the dialogue, but also improvise to ensure that the voice heard on screen seems as authentic as possible.

[...] when artists come from the North [India], it is harder to speak for them because they are not aware of the timing and where to pause, or how to modulate but even modulation is not a problem but the pauses so [for a dialogue like] “*nee enggama poiyyirunthe?*” [...] if the artist said it like “*nee engga* [pause] *amma poiyyirunthe?*” so we have to fill it in [the pause with other relevant sound or emotion]. (PuthuYugamTV, 2014, 6:21)

The phrase “*ellam dubbing la pathukallam*” was mentioned both in the Blogeswari’s (2007) blog and Savitha Reddy’s interview (IndiaGlitz Tamil Movies, 2014). It means that everything can be sorted out during the dubbing process, highlighting the important role played by dubbing artists in improvising the dialogue, the modulation, or the emotion in their voice to suit the body language and expression of actresses who are “uttering” the dialogue. She would also adjust the pace of the speech according to the pace used by each actress. This gives an indication of the important role played by the voice-actors in making the acting as realistic as possible.

The lack of authenticity becomes even more serious when former heroines dub the voice for other actresses.

Saritha for Naghma in *Kaadhalan* and other films, Revathi for Kajol in *Minsara Kanavu* and Tabu in *Kandukondein*, Banupriya for Urmila Matondkar in *Indian* and Jayasudha in *Alaipayuthey* [...] But when popular character actors dub for other actors, you can't [help but] visualize the dubbing actor's face instead of the one on screen (Blogeswari, 2007, para 6).

Suresh Kumar who commented on Blogeswari's (2007) blog explained that he felt weird when he hears a voice he is familiar with such as Chinmayi, a dubbing artist and a popular playback singer while watching someone else in the scenes. Other than the lack of authenticity, these websites also complained that actresses lose their uniqueness when they use someone else's voice. With popular male actors, one will be able to identify them just by listening to their voice. Everyone has a different tone, modulation, and style. However, it would be hard to do the same for leading actresses because of the extensive use of dubbed voices. It has been reported that Anuradha (a dubbing artists from the 1980s) has a career that spans over 25 years and has dubbed for 1,000 movies, which include movies in other languages (Padmanabhan, 2014). Another dubbing artist, Sreeja Ravi, claimed in her interview that she has dubbed for more than 500 Tamil movies (PuthuYugamTV, 2014).

No wonder Simran and Jyothika sounded the same. Real life sisters Radha and Ambika had the same voice too - Durga R. Sundarrajan [she gave voice to both sisters] [...] (Blogeswari, 2007, para 3)

This is a very popular myth and excuse for stereotyping audience taste[s]. Actually, everyone has [a] unique tone to them and you have [to] use it to ur [your] advantage. But most of our producer[s] are AFRAID of trying new voices so they stick to old voices which have worked with people. (Shakti in "Why are they given dubbing voice," n.d.)

Kannan (2012, Section Savitha) in her article explained:

When you speak to Savitha [a dubbing artist] over [the] phone,

you can't help but wonder if the person on the other end of the line is Simran [a very popular heroine from the 1990s], as she has dubbed for the actress in most of her films.

Deepa Venkat (a dubbing artist) in her interview recalled a phone conversation with Simran where Simran admitted that talking to Deepa Venkat sounded like she was talking to herself because Deepa Venkat dubbed for her in many movies (IndiaGlitz Tamil Movies, 2014).

Everyone has a unique voice but the variety in women's voices is not heard from Tamil movies leading ladies because of the use of a limited number of dubbing artists both for heroines who can or cannot speak Tamil. The exceptions are a small number of actresses who continue to use their own voices, such as Asin, Priyamani, and Priya Anand.

Discussion

One of the main reasons why Tamil heroines use dubbed voices is because most Tamil heroines are neither ethnolinguistically Tamil nor competent Tamil speakers (Nakassis, 2015). When actresses are not able to speak Tamil, it is also very difficult for them to speak in the various accents of Tamil according to the character in the movies. This fact is widely known by industry insiders and audiences of Tamil movies (Nakassis, 2015). Nakassis (2015) goes on to explain that the lack of Tamil-speaking heroines is due to the historical stigma of the cinema and to being an actress. In his paper, he explained that as many acting roles include dancing, exposing one's body, or hugging and kissing a man, they are not seen as things that a *family girl* would do and, therefore, she is looked down upon by some sections of the society. He has also explained the complex intersection of caste, class, and notions of masculinity and femininity in Tamil society in India, and how these discourage Tamil women from being involved in the glamour of Tamil cinema. On the other hand, Tamil movie viewers in a study in Malaysia highlighted the fact that there is an emphasis on casting a fair/white heroine; therefore, their competency in Tamil is not considered important by the moviemakers (Karupiah, 2015).

However, the above discussion does not explain why dubbed voices are used for so many heroines including those who are competent in speaking Tamil such as Trisha,⁷ Sneha, and Nayanthara. Sneha used a dubbed voice

in some of her Tamil movies while Nayanthara and Trisha have used voice dubbing in the majority of their Tamil movies. One of the most puzzling questions is why actresses who are able to speak Tamil agree to using a dubbed voice as doing so makes them ineligible for the National Award, which is considered the most prominent award ceremony for Indian movies (see National Film Award Regulations, 2011).⁸ One possible explanation is that actresses have a short career as a heroine in Tamil cinema. This is because there is an obsession with casting young heroines in Tamil movies (Karupiah, 2015). Most heroines are given supporting roles when they reach their mid or late thirties. This obsession is not only seen in Tamil movies but also in Hollywood movies, although there are more Hollywood movies featuring older women stars in recent years (Jermyn, 2012). Therefore, actresses may choose to maximize their on-screen presence by committing themselves to many movies in a short period of time rather than spending time dubbing their voices for their movies.

Voice-actors on the other hand, have careers that span decades. Because voice-actors are hidden from the camera, they enjoy a long career as long as they are still able to portray youthfulness in their voice. The long career of these voice-actors also means that at least three generations of leading actresses are heard to have similar voices. As heroines are often showcased as the most attractive in the movies, this may lead to the stereotyping of types of voices that are considered feminine and attractive. Because the media is a powerful socializing agent, generations of viewers may be socialized to believe that only limited types of voices are feminine or attractive. Future research needs to explore this by taking into account the views of the audience. Dubbing artists also do not enjoy celebrity status nor are they

⁷ Trisha, Sneha, and Nayanthara speak Tamil in interviews and other TV shows. Trisha and Sneha are generally identified as Tamils. Nayanthara's mother tongue is Malayalam. See Appendix B for a list of contemporary actresses and the dubbing of their movies.

⁸ Among the Tamil film fraternity and audience, there is a general understanding that the use of a dubbed voice is the reason why many leading actresses have not won the National Award since the 1980s. However, this does not explain how Shobana won the National Award for the Malayalam movie *Manichitrathazhu* (1993) even though she used dubbed voices from two different dubbing artists in that movie (The News Minute, 2016). Another controversy related to the use of a dubbing voice by an actress in the lead role is when Kiron Kher won the National Award for best actress in 1999. Reeta Kayral, a Bengali actress claimed that she dubbed the voice for Kiron Kher's role (Kalidas & Ghosh, 2000). Therefore, I am not sure when this rule (on dubbed voices) was first included in the National Awards regulation.

as well appreciated for their skills as the actresses. Deepa Venkat in her interview explained that only two actresses had called her and appreciated her efforts in giving voice to their acting. She also added that the role of a dubbing artist is as important as the role of the actress but she was not sure how the actress felt about the matter (IndiaGlitz Tamil Movies, 2014). While the career patterns of heroines and voice-actors are different, they are two examples of the many women laborers who are being discriminated against in a male-dominated film industry, and this can also be explored in future research.

Why is the use of voice dubbing among female lead actors a problem? As shown in the analysis, in Tamil movies a few dubbing artists are often used to provide voices for many actresses; hence, only limited types of voice are heard from the heroines, who are often associated with attractiveness and goodness in Tamil movies. This trend somehow limits the variation in the types of voices heard from the lead characters in movies. In terms of physical appearance, there is overwhelming evidence that women who are shown in the media such as movies often fall within a very narrowly defined set of beauty standards (Davis, 2000; Karupiah, 2015; Spurgas 2005). Some of these beauty standards may be unachievable and unrealistic for most women (Forbes, Collinworth, Jobe, Braun, & Wise, 2007; Spurgas, 2005). In Tamil movies, women showcased in the lead roles are mostly thin, fair/white, and young. They often are the love interest of the lead male character and are shown to be carefree and playful. There is a high prevalence of women shown in revealing clothes, some that are not commonly worn by women in Tamil Nadu. In addition, women are sexualized in dance sequences; not only are they shown in revealing clothes but also with suggestive dance moves (Karupiah, 2016). Sexualization and the objectification of women is emphasized through the use of the camera. It is common for the camera to move along the different body parts of a woman, particularly when focusing on the heroine. The movement of the camera alternated with pauses is often used accordingly to show a woman's breasts, lips, or midriff (Karupiah, 2016). In addition, women including those playing supporting roles are objectified in scripts, through using double meanings or colloquial terms that literally or figuratively identify women as objects. Such portrayals not only objectify women on screen but clearly show that the portrayal of women in Tamil movies is meant for the heterosexual male gaze.

With the use of a limited number of dubbing artists in Tamil movies, the type of voices for female lead roles heard in movies occupies a narrow spectrum, similar to how the heroines' physical appearances have been narrowly defined. Therefore, as Silverman (1988) argued, their voices are also limited to what is defined by the directors and movie technicians as the norm. Because the heroine is mostly the love interest of the movie's hero, she is often portrayed as good and mostly conforms to the traditional notion of femininity even when shown in sexy attire (Chinniah, 2008; Karupiah, 2016); the restricted range of voices are also projected as being attractive and good. The few types of women's voices that are heard in Tamil movies are soft, childlike, and gentle to exemplify the heroine's youth and immaturity.

There may be two explanations why female voices are limited in Tamil movies. First, as heroines are often presented as pleasurable objects for the male gaze of other male characters in the movie or the audience, their voice, like their physical appearance is also being packaged according to what is assumed to be attractive to the viewers as noted by Shakti ("Why are they given dubbing voice," n.d.), *voice that works*. Silverman (1988) used the plot of the movie *Singin' in the Rain* (1952) to explain how only female voices that seem to have compatibility with the body are used in cinema. A voice that contradicts the visual appearance is resisted in sound cinema. Voices that are hoarse or rough are not heard from the heroines because they are deemed incompatible with a beautiful and attractive body. Therefore, her body and voice are being fitted into what is considered attractive. She looks and sounds young, often playing a role that highlights her immaturity and playfulness. Another possible explanation is also related to the male gaze. As heroines are presented mostly to provide visual impact, the uniqueness of their voices becomes less important. The fact that many heroines sound similar—or the same—may not be seen as important as long as the heroines can be presented as visually attractive.

This is very different when it comes to the heroes. Most Tamil movies are hero-centric and hence the role of the hero is seen as important to the storyline. Thus the cast of heroes has more variation in terms of looks, size (Karupiah, 2015) and voice as most heroes deliver their dialogue themselves, including speaking in various dialects and slang. The heroes are able to have a voice even if it does not seem compatible with their body. Hence, many different kinds of voices are heard from the leading men.

Using their own voice maintains the authenticity of their acting and gives uniqueness to their performance. Viewers are able to identify the actor not only from his looks but also from the way he sounds. In stage and television shows, many mimicry artists i.e., impressionists try to imitate the voices of male actors in Tamil cinema.

Limitations and Future Research

One of the limitations of this study is that it only focused on analyzing the voices of the heroines. It did not include the voices of supporting actor/actresses. This is mainly because not all supporting actors and actresses are listed in Tamil movies. In addition, the dubbing artists used are not listed according to the actors who use their voice. However, some examples of former heroines who used dubbed voices in supporting roles in the later stages of their careers are Nagma, Nirosha, Ambika, while Radhika, Saranya, and Revathi use their own voices. Many male actors such as Prakash Raj, Jeyaram, Prabhu, Samuthira Kani who have acted, or still act in lead roles use their own voices when taking a supporting role. Similarly, actors such as the late Manivannan, the late Raghuvaran, and Radha Ravi, who often take a supporting role in movies, use their own voices. However, actors such as Ashish Vidyarthi, Vidyut Jammwal, Danny Denzongpa, and Sharath Lohitashwa, who are not native speakers and mainly act as antagonists, use dubbed voices (Suganth, 2016).

Another limitation of this study is that it did not include an analysis of the voices used for characters that do not conform to the hegemonic norms of masculinity and femininity. In Tamil movies, portrayal of *aravani*⁹ is more common compared to other transgender people (e.g., Sarath Kumar in *Kanchana*, 2011 and Prakash Raj in *Appu*, 2000). In some movies, heroes take dual roles: a heterosexual male exhibiting many elements of hegemonic masculinity as the hero and a male to female transgendered person as the antagonist (e.g., Vikram in *Iru Mugan*, 2016 and Jayam Ravi in *Aadhi*

⁹ *Aravani/hijras* are people who are biological males but reject traditional notion of masculinity. They identify themselves as closer to women and can be considered male-to-female transgenders/transsexuals (Chakrapani, Babu, & Ebenezer, 2004). The term transgender/transsexual is not the most accurate translation of the term *aravani* because it does not capture the social and cultural meaning of the term *aravani*.

Bhagavan, 2013). There are also movies that portray effeminate men (e.g., Kamal Hasan in *Visvaroopam*, 2013 and Ajith in *Varalaru*, 2006). In most cases, the actors use their own voices. However, it is not clear how voice is used generally to portray characters that do not conform to the binary gender norms. Future research should focus on providing a more detailed explanation.

Conclusions

The findings of this study clearly show that there is a clear bias in the use of dubbed voices in Tamil movies. The use of voice dubbing limits the type of voice heard from the leading female actors in Tamil movies. Feminists have often argued that women's voices are not heard in the film industry, highlighting the lack of movies directed by women and presented from women's points of view. Feminists often argue that the media, in general, showcases very limited body types, color, or features; this encourages various stereotypes about women and may be harmful to viewers. In this matter, Tamil movies go further by limiting not only what is seen on screen but the female voices heard in movies.

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Appendix A

List of Movies Analyzed

Movie	Hero	Heroine
1 <i>Paalum Pazhamum</i> (1961)	Sivaji Ganesan	Saroja Devi
2 <i>Bhagyalakshmi</i> (1961)	Gemini Ganesan	Soucar Janaki
3 <i>Naanum Oru Penn</i> (1963)	S.S. Rajendran	Vijayakumari
4 <i>En Kadamai</i> (1964)	MGR	Saroja Devi
5 <i>Anbe Vaa</i> (1966)	MGR	Saroja Devi
6 <i>Pattikaada Pattanama</i> (1972)	Sivaji Ganesan	Jayalalitha
7 <i>Aval Oru Thodarkathai</i> (1974)		Sujatha
8 <i>Dheerga Sumangali</i> (1974)	Muthuraman	K.R. Vijaya
9 <i>Bhuvana Oru Kelvi Kuri</i> (1977)	Rajini Kanth	Sumithra
10 <i>Sila Nerangalil Sila Manidharkal</i> (1977)		Lakshmi
11 <i>Kizhake Pogum Rail</i> (1978)	Sudhakar Dubbed voice	Radhika
12 <i>Indru Poi Nalai Vaa</i> (1981)	K. Baghyaraj	Radhika
13 <i>Mann Vaasanai</i> (1983)	Pandian	Revathi
14 <i>Vidhi</i> (1984)	Mohan***	Poornima Jayaram (Dubbed voice)
15 <i>Kadalora Kavithaigal</i> (1986)	Satyaraj	Rekha (Dubbed voice)
16 <i>Mannan</i> (1992)	Rajini Kanth	Vijayshanthi (Dubbed voice, Saritha)
17 <i>Muthu</i> (1995)	Rajini Kanth	Meena**
18 <i>Minsara Kanavu</i> (1997)	Prabhu Deva Dubbed voice	Kajol (Dubbed voice, Revathi)
19 <i>Youth</i> (2002)	Vijay	Shaheen Khan (Dubbed voice)
20 <i>Vaseegara</i> (2003)	Vijay	Sneha**(Dubbed voice)
21 <i>Boys</i> (2003)	Siddharth	Genelia (Dubbed voice)
22 <i>Vasool Raja MBBS</i> (2004)	Kamal Hasan	Sneha**(Dubbed voice)
23 <i>Giri</i> (2004)	Arjun	Reema Sen/Devayani Both dubbed voice
24 <i>Ayya</i> (2005)	Sarath Kumar	Nayanthara**(Dubbed voice)
25 <i>Sivakasi</i> (2005)	Vijay	Asin
26 <i>Priyasakhi</i> (2005)	Madhavan	Sadha (Dubbed voice)
27 <i>Polladhavan</i> (2007)	Dhanush	Divya (Dubbed voice)

Movie	Hero	Heroine
28 <i>Yaradhi Nee Mohini</i> (2008)	Dhanush	Nayanthara**(Dubbed voice)
29 <i>Santhosh Subramaniam</i> (2008)	Jeyam Ravi	Genelia (Dubbed voice)
30 <i>Pazhani</i> (2008)	Bharath	Kajal Agarwal (Dubbed voice)
31 <i>Vamanan</i> (2009)	Jai	Priya Anand
32 <i>Villu</i> (2009)	Vijay	Nayanthara**(Dubbed voice, Savitha Reddy)
33 <i>Kandain Kadhalai</i> (2009)	Barath	Tamanaa (Dubbed voice, Chinmayi)
34 <i>Kandasamy</i> (2009)	Vikram	Shreya (Dubbed voice, Suchitra)
35 <i>Ayaan</i> (2009)	Surya	Tamanaa (Dubbed voice)
36 <i>Sura</i> (2010)	Vijay	Tamanaa (Dubbed voice, Chinmayi)
37 <i>Uthama Puthiran</i> (2010)	Dhanush	Genelia (Dubbed voice, Savitha Reddy)
38 <i>Nagarum Marupakkam</i> (2010)	Sundar C	Anuya (Dubbed voice)
39 <i>Thillalangadi</i> (2010)	Jeyam Ravi	Tamanaa (Dubbed voice, Savitha Reddy)
40 <i>Mayakkam Enna</i> (2011)	Dhanush	Richa (Dubbed voice, Deepa Venkat)

Note. *** In this movie, Mohan plays the main role but a negative role. Most Mohan's movies used S.N. Surendar's voice.

** Meena, Nayanthara, and Sneha used dubbed voices in most of their movies even though they are able to speak Tamil.

Appendix B

Some Contemporary Tamil-Speaking Actresses and the Dubbing of Their Movies

Actresses	Examples of movies using own voice	Examples of movies using a dubbed voice
Nayantara	<i>Naanum Rowdy Thaan</i> (2015)	<i>Ghajini</i> (2008) <i>Thani Oruvan</i> (2015) <i>Boss Engira Baskaran</i> (2010) <i>Aadhavan</i> (2009) and most of her other movies. It is estimated that she has worked in 26 Tamil movies since 2005.
Priyamani	<i>Raavanan</i> (2010) <i>Paruthi Veeran</i> (2007) <i>Thotta</i> (2008)	<i>Madhu</i> (2006)
Priya Anand	<i>Vanakkam Chennai</i> (2013) <i>Arima Nambi</i> (2014) <i>180</i> (2011) <i>Ethirneechal</i> (2013)	She uses own voice in most of her movies
Trisha	<i>Ayutha Ezhutbu</i> (2004) <i>Manmadhan Ambu</i> (2010) <i>Mankatha</i> (2011)	<i>Vinmai Thaanai Varuvaaya</i> (2010) <i>Enrendum Punnagai</i> (2013) <i>Kireedam</i> (2007) <i>Thirupachi</i> (2005) and most of her other movies. It is estimated that she has acted in 28 Tamil movies since 1999.
Asin	<i>Pokkiri</i> (2007) <i>Vel</i> (2007) <i>Majaa</i> (2005) <i>Ghajini</i> (2008) Most of her movies. It is estimated that she has acted in 11 Tamil movies.	
Sruthi Hassan	<i>7-aam Arivu</i> (2011) <i>Puli</i> (2015)	
Keerthi Suresh	<i>Idhu Enna Maayam</i> (2015) <i>Rajini Murugan</i> (2016)	
Sneha	<i>Achamundu Achamundu</i> (2009) <i>Parthiban Kanavu</i> (2003) <i>Pirivom Santhippom</i> (2008) <i>Un Samayal Araiya!</i> (2014)	<i>Paandi</i> (2008) <i>Pudupetta!</i> (2006) <i>ABCD</i> (2005)
Varalakshmi Sarathkumar	<i>Poda Podi</i> (2012) <i>Thara Thappatai</i> (2016)	-
Andrea	<i>Valiyavan</i> (2015) <i>Vishwaroopam</i> (2013) <i>Ayirathil Oruvan</i> (2010)	She uses own voice in all her movies She also dubs for other actresses.

Actresses	Examples of movies using own voice	Examples of movies using a dubbed voice
Anjali	<i>Kalakalappu</i> (2012) <i>Engeyum Eppothum</i> (2011)	<i>Angadi Theru</i> (2010)
Samantha	<i>Neethane En Pomasantham</i> (2012) <i>10 Enrathukkekulle</i> (2015)	<i>Kathi</i> (2014) <i>Anjaan</i> (2014) <i>Naan Ee</i> (2012)
Pooja Umashankar	<i>Vidhyum Munn</i> (2013) <i>Naan kadavul</i> (2009)	<i>Oram Po</i> (2007) <i>Pori</i> (2007) <i>Thambi</i> (2006) <i>Attagasam</i> (2004)

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