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*Tolkaappiyam:*  
**The Basic Work of Ancient Tamil Language and Culture<sup>1</sup>**

**1. General Remarks**

It is understandable that such a notion as ‘linguistics in India’ makes one first think of the Sanskrit-language tradition which centers around Pāṇini’s (c. 400 BC) grammar. This is so because even today this grammar represents the most advanced theorizing in its own field, viz. the formal description of a single language. It takes some mental effort to fully grasp how unique this situation is. In no other scientific discipline is it the case that the oldest extant work is still the best (cf. Itkonen 1991: chap. 2). However, India has also something else to offer to the ‘world history’ of linguistics. It is the purpose of this paper to substantiate this claim.

A great number of languages not belonging to the Indo-European family are spoken on the Indian subcontinent. Beside the Indo-Aryan languages that descend from Prakrit, or the language of ‘lower’ social classes (rather than directly from Sanskrit), the largest language-family is constituted by the Dravidian languages. The most important among these are Tamil, Malayalam, Kannada, and Telugu, with 48, 26, 25, and 55 millions of native speakers, respectively. According to Steever (1998: 6–13), the history of the Dravidian languages may be represented in the form of a three-stage family tree. The protolanguage (c. 4000 BC) was divided into four branches, namely South Dravidian, South-Central Dravidian, Central Dravidian, and North Dravidian. Among these branches the first is the youngest one (c. 1500 BC). It gave rise to Tamil, Malayalam, and Kannada, whereas Telugu descends from South-Central Dravidian. Tamil is spoken in the southernmost part of the subcontinent and in Sri Lanka. This geographic location explains why the Tamil culture is generally regarded as the most autonomous vis-à-vis the (originally Sanskrit-based) Aryan culture. It is also the case that the Tamil-language literature is older than any literature composed in other Dravidian

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<sup>1</sup>I am grateful to prof. Asko Parpola for his support during my “visits” to ancient India.

languages.

The oldest extant document of Tamil language is the grammar *Tolkaappiyam* ('Old Book'), which was for the most part composed rather exactly at the beginning of the Christian era. The so-called *cankam* or *sangam* literature is of a more recent origin (c. 300–500 AD). It consists of more than 2000 love poems or heroic poems, composed by 473 different poets, which bears witness to a remarkable artistic activity. In fact, *cankam* refers to a (mythical) 'academy of poetry'.

The state of language described by *Tolkaappiyam* is characterized as the early period of Ancient Tamil. The state of language represented by *cankam* poetry qualifies as the middle period of Ancient Tamil. This could lead one to assume that the language of *Tolkaappiyam* is far removed from Modern Tamil. However, this is not the case. Compared to the changes that separate today's Romance languages from Vulgar Latin, or Hindi from the Middle-Indo-Aryan state of language (cf. Masica 1991: 52–55), changes which have taken place during the last two thousand years, it is quite amazing to see how close Modern Tamil has remained to the earliest documented stage of Tamil. And here 'Modern Tamil' does not even refer to its high-cultured or literary variant (*centamiz*), but rather to its everyday variant (*koṭuntamiz*), as described e.g. by Asher (1985).

Just like Pāṇini's grammar, *Tolkaappiyam* too was industriously commented upon. In what follows, I shall mainly concentrate on its second book. Six commentaries of this book, written during the period 1000–1700, have been preserved — in a more or less complete form — until the present day. For my exposition, the commentary composed by Ceenaavaraiyar (c. 1300) plays a central role, because Chevillard (1996) offers an annotated French translation both of the second book of *Tolkaappiyamin* and of this commentary. The commentary tradition of Pāṇini's grammar has been uninterrupted, whereas the tradition dealing with *Tolkaappiyam* was apparently broken at some point. Together with the *cankam* poetry, it was rediscovered in the mid-19th century, and it has played an important part in the national awakening of the Tamil population.

As far as the 'world history' of linguistics is concerned, it is important to find out to what extent different traditions that have developed independently resemble one another. What they have in common, must be **universal** in character (cf. Itkonen 1991, 2000). On the other hand, it is also clear that a given tradition need not be independent from others in order to constitute a

valuable object of research. Now, it is obvious that *Tolkaappiyam* has been influenced by some Sanskrit-language grammatical tradition — this is clearly stated already in the Introduction — which means that it cannot offer independent evidence for the ‘universal history’ of linguistics. However, the tradition embodied by *Tolkaappiyam* is not that of Pāṇini, and therefore it retains an interest of its own.

More importantly, however, it has to be noted that, contrary to Pāṇini’s grammar and to other similar works to be mentioned below, the significance of *Tolkaappiyam* is by no means restricted to linguistics (and to considerations of history and/or philosophy of science that take linguistics as their starting point). *Tolkaappiyam* contains three books. The first book *Eḷuttatātikaaram* deals with phonology (*eḷuttu* = ‘letter’/‘sound’), while the second book *Collatikaaram* deals with morphology, syntax, sentence-level semantics, and part of the lexicon (*col* = ‘word’). Thus, the contents of these two books can be described quite accurately with concepts taken from modern linguistics. The title of the third book *Poruḷatikaaram* contains the word *poruḷ*, which roughly corresponds to the Latin word *res*. It may stand for the meaning and/or referent both of words and of sentences, but it has also such more general meanings as ‘thing’ and ‘topic’. Here it means the **topic of poetry** and, simultaneously, the manner in which this has to be expressed. Under this title, the *Weltanschauung* of the upper-class members of the ancient Tamil society is represented in its smallest details. Thus, the third book of *Tolkaappiyam* transcends the limits of linguistics and, although purporting to be about poetry, represents cultural studies in the widest sense of the word.

Already in the first two books there are some passages (especially the eighth book of *Collatikaaram*) which clearly anticipate the transcending of linguistics that will take place in the third book. It is in this crucial respect that *Tolkaappiyam* differs from such classical grammars as Pāṇini’s *Aṣṭādhyāyī*, which, as noted before, inaugurates the (documented) Sanskrit-language tradition, or Sībawaihi’s (d. 793) *Al-Kitāb*, which inaugurates the linguistics in Arabia, or Apollonius Dyscolus’ (c. 200 AD) *Peri syntaxeōs*, which is the oldest extant treatise of syntax in the Western tradition.

## 2. Text vs. Commentary

The importance of **commentaries** becomes evident in the context of research on classical works, i.e. works that stand at the beginning of great traditions.

According to a well-known characterization that William Jones gave in 1786, Pāṇini is "dark as the darkest oracle". In the same vein, G.Jahn, the German translator of *Al-Kitāb*, judged in 1895 that among the Arab grammarians Sībawaihi is "der älteste und dunkelste" (i.e. "the oldest and the darkest"), but also the best. Again in the same vein, Chevillard (1996: 23) notes that *Tolkaappiyam* is often just a "rébus sybillin" (i.e. "an oracle-like enigma"). In all these cases there is a consensus that it just would not make sense to try to read the original text without a prior acquaintance with the commentary literature. As a consequence, a book like Albert (1985), which gives a literal English translation of the first two books of *Tolkaappiyam*, cannot be of much use.

In any case, it is interesting to note that there exist some differences of opinion as to how, exactly, the relation between the original text and the commentary should be interpreted and valued. At first, it seems self-evident that the temporal order and the order of importance must coincide: the original text is primary and the commentary is secondary. This 'standard view' has recently been confirmed with some emphasis by S.D. Joshi and J. A. F. Roodbergen (1992), who are central figures of the modern Pāṇini-scholarship. After investigating Pāṇini for more than 20 years on the basis of Patañjali's (c. 150 BC) 'Great Commentary', and after publishing 12 large volumes, they now announce that they are going to abandon this approach and are going, instead, to examine Pāṇini as 'directly' as possible (while, to be sure, making use of a commentary tradition somewhat neglected before). By contrast, Chevillard (1996: 23–24) asserts that, in the case of *Tolkaappiyam*, the commentary is more important than the original text. This claim sounds paradoxical, but it has to be taken seriously. One must distinguish between cases where the commentary merely makes the original text comprehensible and cases where the commentary genuinely goes beyond the original text.

The cases of the latter type may further be divided into (at least) three distinct subclasses. First, it is possible that the original text presents the data which is then analyzed by the commentary. This alternative is well illustrated by the treatment of the morphology of Ancient Tamil in some parts of the second book of *Tolkaappiyam*.

Second, it is possible that the original text merely hints at something which is assumed to be known to everybody in the audience. Afterwards this shared knowledge may have disappeared, which means that the commentary has to reconstruct it and present it — maybe for the first time — in an explicit

form. As far as *Tolkaappiyam* is concerned, this might seem to apply to the beginning of the first chapter of the third book (cf. below).

Third, it is possible that the original text merely gives a clue which is then expanded into a theory by the commentary. A good example is provided by the entire history of Western syntax. On the first two pages of his *Peri hermeneiās* Aristotle made a few somewhat disconnected remarks on the sentence structure. In the Middle Ages every self-respecting philosopher and/or grammarian devoted dozens of pages to commenting upon this brief passage (cf. Arens 1984); and the conceptions interpreted and elaborated upon in this way became a central (and largely unconscious) part of the Western theory of syntax which is influential even today. An analogous example is provided by Pāṇini's rule *samāṛthahpadavidhiḥ* ('co-semantic word-rule', i.e. 'a rule applies to two or more words simultaneously only on the condition that their meanings are related'). It is because of this rule that investigating the 'meaning vs. referent' distinction became part of the Pāṇinian tradition. Patañjali presented 213 comments on it, and Joshi (1968) devoted a 242-page book to analyzing it.

Hence, it turns out that the commentary can indeed be more important than the original text. In this sense, then, Chevillard is right. However, he seems **also** to commit a fallacy, of the following type: the commentary is more important (or 'primary') simply because we would not understand the original text without it. But this is like saying that since we cannot see the stars without the telescope, in astronomy the telescope is more important than the stars.

### 3. A Survey of *Tolkaappiyam*

Next, I shall proceed to examine *Tolkaappiyam* at some length. It is generally assumed that its first two books were composed by a single person (whereas the third book may be a collective achievement which received its definitive form maybe in the 5th century). He is simply called by a name derived from the title of the book, viz. *Tolkaappiyanaar*. The book contains a ritualistic repetition "as the savants say", which indicates that it is based on a preceding tradition. This tradition must be an indigenous one because what "the savants say" concerns details of the grammatical description of Ancient Tamil.

The text of *Tolkaappiyam* is written in a poetic verse. It contains three books (*atikaaram*), each of which is divided into nine chapters (*iyal*). The chapters of one and the same book are roughly of equal length. The three

books contain, respectively, 420, 463 and 659 ‘rules’ (which are referred to by the Sanskrit term *sūtra*). The length of the rules varies greatly. Many phonological rules encompass only one line. By contrast, rules that regulate the behavior of lovers, or of the husband and the wife, may encompass a whole page.

### 3.1. Book One

As noted before, the first book *Eluttatikaaram* treats the phonology of Ancient Tamil. The following summary is based on the translation and the commentary by Zvelebil (1972–1974). The sounds are enumerated in the first chapter: 12 vowels, 18 consonants plus *h*, and the word-final ‘overshort’ *i ja u*. The restrictions on the occurrence of sounds in the beginning, in the middle, and in the end of words are presented in the second chapter. In the third chapter the sounds are classified according to their manner of articulation, using a set of binary distinctions. Vowels (whether long or short) are classified as follows: +rounded (= u,o) vs. –rounded; –rounded = +contact (= i, e, ai) vs. –contact (= a). Consonants are classified as follows: +labial = bilabial (= p, m) vs. labiodental (= v); –labial = +tip (or apical) vs. –tip; +tip = –rising (= t, ŋ, t, n) vs. +rising (= r, n, ɽ, ɻ); –tip = +swelling (= l, ɭ) vs. –swelling; –swelling = middle tongue (= c, ñ) vs. back tongue (= k, ŋ). (A line and a dot below a consonant mean an alveolar and a retroflex manner of articulation, respectively.) The remaining chapters deal with various sandhi phenomena, i.e. with how joining words together affects the word-final and the word-initial sounds. There is sandhi between a vowel and a vowel, between a vowel and a consonant, between a consonant and a vowel, and between a consonant and a consonant. As a process, sandhi is divided into non-change and change; and the latter is subdivided into assimilation, addition, and deletion. Sandhi is illustrated with great many examples, and exceptions are enumerated separately. Especially in the later chapters the manner of presentation is very detailed.

### 3.2. Book Two

My most important sources concerning the second book or *Collatikaaram* are — in this order — Chevillard (1996) and Sastri (1945). Because the structure of this book is based on the word-class division, this has to be presented first.

According to the ‘basic’ position, words (*col*) are divided into two main classes, namely nouns (*peyar*) and verbs (*vinai*), members of which are independent units. But the designation *col* is **also** applied to two types of non-independent units: on the one hand, affixes occurring either in the inside or in the end of nouns and verbs, as well as word-final clitics and sentence particles; on the other hand, roots of nouns and/or verbs. Hence, the key term *col* does not receive a uniform interpretation. Nowadays it is generally thought that there are two well-established word-classes in Ancient Tamil, namely noun and verb, and two somewhat questionable word-classes, namely adjective and adverb, both of which have a restricted number of members. There is no reason to postulate a separate class of ‘pronouns’, and expressions that were later to become postpositions can still be recognized as locational nouns (cf. Lehmann 1994: 22–27, 50).

Next, I shall examine all the chapters of *Collatikaaram* in order. When I simply speak of the ‘commentary’, I shall always mean the above-mentioned commentary by Ceṇṇaavaraiyar.

### 3.2.1. Chapter 1

The first chapter (‘Introduction to language’, rules 1–61) gives the general framework within which the actual description will take place. Its central topic is the semantic classification which transcends the divide between the two principal word-classes and, at the same time, constitutes the basis of syntax: the nouns are divided into subclasses which are expressed only in the verbs. More precisely, in the singular a three-way distinction is made between nouns that refer to men, women, and other beings, and in the plural a two-way distinction is made between nouns that refer to human and nonhuman beings. The singular nouns referring to men or women and the plural nouns referring to humans belong to the ‘high class’, whereas other nouns belong to the ‘low class’ (which Chevillard also calls ‘neuter’). Thus, nouns are divided, first, into two main categories (‘high vs. low’) and, second, into five subclasses (SG-male, SG-female, SG-neuter, PL-human, PL-nonhuman). This classification is purely semantic (unlike the ‘gender’ system of the Indo-European languages). The subclass of a noun is not expressed by the noun itself (apart from some derived nouns); rather, it is expressed by the finite verb whose subject the noun is. The same formal marking recurs in the (noun-like) pronouns formed with the ‘deictic vowels’ *i-* (‘near’), *u-* (‘in the middle

distance'), and *a-* ('far away'). The following examples, where the subject of the verb is a pronoun with an initial *a* -vowel, illustrate how the semantic classification works:

ava <u>n</u> vanta <u>a</u> n	=	'he came (far away)'
ava <u>l</u> vanta <u>a</u> l	=	'she came (- " -)'
ava <u>r</u> vanta <u>a</u> r	=	'they-HUMAN came (- " -)'
atu vanta <u>t</u> u	=	'it came (- " -)'
ava <u>i</u> vanta/vanta <u>ṅa</u>	=	'they-NONHUMAN came (- " -)'

Thus, the basic marking of the subclasses of nouns is as follows: *-n* = SG-male; *-l* = SG-female; *-r* = PL-human; *-tu* = SG-neuter; *-a* = PL-nonhuman. (To be sure, there is a great amount of allomorphic variation.) But recall that this marking does **not** occur in the nouns themselves. (In this respect the deictic pronouns are exceptions.)

The real (or non-deictic) personal pronouns inflect like nouns, since they do not express the subclasses. Therefore 'person' can be a grammatical meaning expressed by a noun. The first and second persons differ from the third insofar as the former entail the notion of 'coming' and, qua expressions of recipients, occur together with the variant of *give* meaning 'bring' (since in the speech situation their referents are 'here'), whereas the latter entails the notion of 'going' and, qua an expression of a recipient, occurs together with the variant of *give* meaning 'take away' (since in the speech situation its referent is 'there').

The basic rule determines that the finite verb agrees with the subclass and the person of its subject. But since the plural marking may be left out (cf. below), it should perhaps be said that, rather than agreeing with the number of its subject, the finite verb expresses it.

In all persons the plural form may express respect towards a single human being. In *Collatikaaram* this usage is labelled as vernacular, but in due time it came to enrich the verbal inflection. Thus, the paradigm of the third person singular is in Modern Tamil as follows (where *H* stands for 'honorific'):

vantaan	=	'he came'
vanta <u>l</u>	=	'she came'
vanta <u>r</u>	=	'(s)he-H came'
vanta <u>t</u>	=	'it came'



In the remaining part of the first chapter it is shown that cases that seem to violate the principles of the noun—verb agreement do not really do so. With the aid of many additional rules it is specified how the subclass is to be expressed in less than clear cases (= hermaphrodites and/or transvestites, gods, abstract notions, beings seen from afar which cannot be ascertained to be either men or women, or even humans). Special rules are also needed for cases where nouns belonging to distinct subclasses, taken together, constitute the subject of a finite verb.

### 3.2.2. Chapter 2

The second chapter ('Chapter on the cases', rules 62–83) deals with the case system. There are seven cases ("or eight if the vocative is counted too"). Originally the cases were designated by means of ordinal numbers or of typical case endings, but today terms borrowed from the Western grammatical tradition are in use. The basic endings of the distinct cases (presented in the traditional order) are as follows: Nominative =  $\emptyset$ ; Accusative = *-ai*; Instrumental = *-oṭu*; Dative = *-ku*; Ablative = *-in*; Genitive = *-atu*; Locative = *-kaṇ*. Next, the cases will be examined in this order.

The most important sentence types are defined depending on which distinct constructions can follow the nominative (i.e. the subject): an existential sentence, an exhortation (with an optative), an assertion (with an indicative), a question, the predication of a property by means of a defective verb derived from an adjective or a noun, a sentence with a noun predicate. Personal pronouns in the nominative (i.e. functioning as subjects) are optional. — It may be added that many nouns possess an uninflected form which is distinct from the nominative and identical with the oblique stem that precedes the case ending.

According to the commentary, the accusative (= *-ai*) expresses three types of relation with respect to acting: an action either creates something or changes something or is merely directed towards something. Following this three-way classification, the commentary enumerates those 28 typical verbs which, according to *Collatikaaram*, demand an accusative (i.e. an accusative object). An accusative may be equally demanded by finite and non-finite verbs.

The instrumental (= *-oṭu* or *-ooṭu*) expresses primarily an instrument or (in explicitly or implicitly passive constructions) an agent, but it may also

express a cause or a companion. Although *-oṭu* is mentioned as the instrumental ending, also the ending *-aan* (or *-aal*) is treated together with it. The commentary interprets this state of affairs in such a way that *-oṭu* and *-aan* represent one and the same case, with the difference that the former primarily expresses a companion whereas the latter primarily expresses an instrument, an agent, or a cause. By contrast, Lehmann (1994: 36–37) takes it for granted that these are two distinct cases, which he calls ‘sociative’ and ‘instrumental’. (Indeed, they correspond rather exactly to the comitative and instrumental endings *-ooṭe* ja *-aale* of Modern Tamil; cf. Asher 1985: 103). Chevillard (1996: 152) postulates one single case and calls it ‘comitative’. Lehmann (1998: 80) accepts a compromise solution and calls the case with the *oṭu/aan*-ending ‘sociative-instrumental’.

The dative (= *-ku* or *-kku*) expresses a recipient, but also a direction or a goal. The ablative (= *-in*) is defined as “this is such as this with respect to this”. The commentary specifies that this case expresses four distinct meanings: object of comparison, ‘limit’ (e.g. ‘east of Y-abl’), source, and cause. When the comparison is made within a typical verb-final sentence, the construction is *X Y-in V* (‘X behaves like Y’). When the comparison is made with an adjective (i.e. with an ‘implicit’ verb derived from an adjective), the construction is *Y-in A X*. Interestingly, this construction has the meaning both of a positive and of a comparative (‘X is as A as Y’ and ‘X is more A than Y’). To bring out that this case differs both from the Indo-European ablative and from the ablative of Modern Tamil, Lehmann (1994: 36) call it ‘equative’. This designation is problematical because — as we just saw — the case with the *in*-ending also expresses ‘non-equative’ comparison; in fact, Steever (1998: 20) uses the designation ‘comparative’. Lehmann (1998: 80) has adopted the name ‘equative-ablative’. For simplicity, I follow Chevillard (1996: 152) in using the name ‘ablative’. The genitive (= *-atu*) expresses possession, and in addition to genuine possession, *Collatikaaram* also enumerates the most important subtypes of non-genuine or metaphorical ‘possession’.

The locative is represented by the morpheme *kaṇ* (‘eye’ > ‘open to view’), and it is said to express the situatedness of an event in space or in time or inside another event. However, the locative clearly differs from all other cases because its marking is not (yet) a case ending, but a postposition, or more exactly a noun with a postpositional function; and there are in all 19 such postpositions expressing various aspects of situatedness (= ‘inside’, ‘outside’,

‘frontside’, ‘backside’, ‘upside’, ‘downside’ etc). In the name of theoretical unity, to be sure, the commentary argues that *-kaṇ* is a case ending, and that the other 18 units are not locational nouns comparable to the *kaṇ*, but rather its meanings; but this is unconvincing.

What we have here is an on-going process of grammaticalization ‘noun > postposition > suffix’, as can be seen from the fact that some locative markings can occur together with a head noun inflected in the ablative (= *-in*) or in the instrumental (= *-aan*) while others have already become genuine suffixes. The latter include *-il*, which originally meant ‘place’ and ‘house’ (and has retained this lexical use beside its suffixal use); it has given rise to the locative ending *-ile* of neuter nouns in Modern Tamil.

In this context it may also be appropriate to mention that Ancient Tamil has a set of semantically empty ‘euphonic affixes’ that can optionally be added between the noun or verb stem and the inflectional ending. This phenomenon is discussed in the first book of *Tolkaappiyam*.

### 3.2.3. Chapter 3

The structure of the third chapter (‘The chapter on the confusion of the cases’, rules 84–117) does not seem very consistent. Therefore I shall present the contents of this chapter in an order which I personally find more comprehensible. In Ancient Tamil it is acceptable to use a case in functions that are normally performed by other cases. As Lehmann (1994: 42) puts it, “ein Kasussuffix [kann] durchaus mit der Funktion eines anderen Kasus gebraucht werden”. To some extent, comparable phenomena occur in all languages, but in Ancient Tamil their frequency seems to be quite exceptional. The commentary specifies that cases can be ‘confused’ in two different ways: either the deviant use of cases can be understood as an extension of its standard use (= ‘confusion of meanings’) or the deviant use has no motivation and just has to be accepted (= ‘confusion of forms’). Although the latter phenomenon is mentioned only in the rule 106, its frequent nature can be inferred from how the rule is formulated. It goes without saying that an arbitrary use of case endings constitutes a genuine problem. This problem is aggravated by the fact, mentioned in the rule 104, that case endings may simply be left out. This fact, repeatedly mentioned by Lehmann (1994), is amply corroborated by extant texts of Ancient Tamil, where the absence of case endings is the rule and their presence is the exception. To top it all (as

mentioned in the fifth chapter), plural markings too may be freely left out. As a result, even a complex sentence is most often just a string of nominal (and verbal) roots, apart from the last word which is a finite verb. This very intriguing phenomenon, which may perhaps be compared to ‘noun stripping’, defined and discussed by Miner (1986), deserves an extensive treatment of its own in some other context.

The motivated ‘confusion’ of cases is illustrated with the aid of many examples. Here too it is possible to distinguish between two somewhat different subtypes. First, two distinct cases may alternate in a given context (like the accusative and the instrumental together with the verb that means ‘be wary’, or the accusative and the ablative together with the verb that means ‘be afraid’). Second, the cases that occur in a typical context may not be the same as occur in a non-typical context. (For instance, the verb with the meaning ‘lean on’, which normally demands an accusative, may in the psychological sense also demand a locative). The rule 110 states that, in a suitable context, the dative may replace any other case.

The following examples clarify the (motivated) ‘confusion’ of cases. The nominative forms of the two nouns are *yaanai* ja *kootu*. For the present purpose, there is no need to analyze the verb completely.

<i>yaanaiy-atu</i>	<i>koott-ai</i>	<i>kuraittaa-n</i>
elephant-GEN	tusk-ACC	shortened-M
<i>yaanaiy-ai</i>	<i>koottin-kan</i>	<i>kuraittaa-n</i>
elephant-ACC	tusk-LOC	shortened-M
<i>yaanaiy-ai</i>	<i>koott-ai</i>	<i>kuraittaa-n</i>
elephant-ACC	tusk-ACC	shortened-M

The meaning of the three sentences is the same: ‘He shortened the tusks of the elephant’, and the variation (rather than ‘confusion’) between the case endings is semantically motivated in an obvious way.

The rule 112 enumerates the basic ontological categories that may be contained in a state of affairs described by a sentence: action, agent, patient, location, time, instrument, recipient, purpose. The commentary characterizes these as *kaarakas*, which is the term for semantic roles in the Pāṇinian tradition. Time and purpose are absent from Pāṇini’s corresponding list. The same is true of action, because action is that at which entities exemplifying different semantic roles participate. On the other hand, Pāṇini’s ‘source’ is

absent from the above list (cf. Itkonen 1991: 32–33, 45–50). It seems clear enough that Pāṇini's *kaarakas* qua semantic entities follow the Sanskrit cases qua formal entities more closely than the *kaarakas* of *Tolkaappiyam* follow the cases of Ancient Tamil. This observation also explains why the list of *kaarakas* is given in the third chapter of *Collatikaaram*, and not in the second chapter, where the standard uses of the cases are described: the distance between ontology and language is accentuated, once it has been stated that case endings may be interchanged or left out.

At the end of the chapter the subtypes of figurative (here: metonymical) expressions are enumerated: whole for part; part for whole; place of producing for product; property for the entity that has it; cause for effect; material for product; producer for product. This list is not directly related to the topic of the chapter.

### 3.2.4. Chapters 4–5

The contents of the fourth chapter (rules 118–154) are indicated by the title 'The uses of the vocative'. The noun in the vocative belongs to the high class, or else it is a noun of the low class which is figuratively used to refer to a human being. Unlike the markings of the other cases, the marking of the vocative is not a suffix (or a postposition). A vocative is produced by changing the last sound (=  $i > ii$ ,  $an > (a)a$ ,  $aa > aay$ ), by lengthening the penultimate sound (=  $ai > aay$ ,  $il > iil$ ,  $al > aal$ ,  $ar > iir$ ; also  $aar > iir$ ), by adding the emphatic clitic *-ee* (especially to words ending with *-oo* or *-u* as well as to all words of the low class), or else the vocative is identical with the nominative. Understandably, there will be an extra lengthening when someone who is far away is called by the name. It is somewhat surprising that a whole chapter is devoted to the vocative, which has earlier been labelled as a marginal case. The reason may be that forms of address are frequent in poetry.

The title of the fifth chapter 'The chapter on nouns' (rules 155–197) is somewhat surprising because nouns have already been treated in all preceding chapters. The general principles of the noun classification were given in the first chapter, and now they are more concretely applied to the data. The only nouns on which the five subclasses are explicitly marked are the deictic, interrogative, and indefinite pronouns. As noted before,  $-n$  ja  $-l$  are the markings of the singular male and female, but an ordinary noun ending with  $-n$  or  $-l$  may belong to any subclass. From among the personal pronouns, 'I' as

well as both the inclusive and the exclusive ‘we’ belong to the high class, whereas ‘you-SG’ and ‘you-PL’ may belong either to the high or to the low class. (This seems to contradict the above-mentioned principle that anyone addressed with a vocative belongs to the high class.) The plural marking for the low class is *-kał* and for the high class *-ar* or *-ir*. For instance, the words whose nominative forms are *kutirai* (‘horse’), *tantai* (‘father’), and *peñtu* (‘woman’) have the corresponding plural forms *kutiraikal*, *tantaiyar*, and *peñtir*. (Afterwards the ending *-kal* was generalized as the plural marking.) The plural need not be expressed in the noun at all:

*kutirai vantatu* = ‘a/the horse came’  
*kutirai vantaña* = ‘(the) horses came’

Because both the case ending and the plural marking may be left out, it follows that “case-inflected plural forms are very rare” (Lehmann 1998: 80). Furthermore, one and the same word may refer both to a human and to an animal, or both to a man and to a woman, either by nature (like ‘cripple’) or figuratively. The latter case is illustrated by the following examples:

*kutirai vantaan* = ‘a/the horse-like man came’  
*kutirai vantaal* = ‘a/the horse-like woman came’

It is explicitly acknowledged that sometimes semantic distinctions have no formal expression. The word for ‘mother’ has of course always a female referent, but as far as the singular nouns of the low class as well as the plural nouns of both the high and the low class are concerned, there is no way to express the ‘male vs. female’ distinction in the verb. The finite verb inflects in person but there are, in addition, so-called cumulative suffixes which leave many distinctions unexpressed; for instance *-um* expresses both the non-past and the third person, but fails to distinguish between the singular and the plural, or between the high class or the low class, or between the male and the female. Insofar as such semantic distinctions can be maintained at all in connection with *um*-forms, they must be inferred from the meaning of the verb: Sentences like ‘Saattan plays music’ and ‘Saattan ruminates grass’ entail that their subjects refer, respectively, to a human being and to an animal. — At the beginning of the chapter a distinction is drawn between the object language and the metalanguage. It is also briefly stated that sentences may be used to express thoughts either directly or indirectly. The commentary

illustrates these claims in great detail.

### 3.2.5. Chapter 6

The sixth chapter ('The chapter on verbs', rules 198–248) deals with the other principal word-class, namely the verb. Understandably enough, it is here that the theory of syntax is approached most explicitly. In discussing this chapter, I shall also take into account the rules 427–441 of the ninth chapter, where, for whatever reason, the nature of the verb is taken up again. Before going into the details, I shall present the general classification of the verbs.

The verbs are characterized by the fact that they have no case inflection and that — "on reflection" — they express the tense. They are divided into finite verbs and non-finite verbs. The finite verbs inflect in the three persons of the singular and the plural as well as in the five subclasses. They are subdivided into explicit and implicit verbs. The former express the tenses 'past', 'present', and 'future' through inflection, whereas the latter express the tense only implicitly or "on reflection" (which is why they are called 'implicit'). The finite verb is the only '**complete** word'; that is, it is the only word that can, taken in itself, constitute an entire sentence. (To be sure, it generally needs complements, but these can remain unexpressed.) The non-finite verbs are subdivided into the adverbial and the adnominal ones; they are **incomplete** words, and, in order to be complete, they demand either a (finite) verb or a noun. The adverbial non-finite verbs (which in modern terminology qualify as infinitives or participles) perform the standard functions of subordinate sentences. The adnominal non-finite verbs constitute the relative-clause structure. (Defining the verb as the word-class which expresses the tense turns out to be problematical in connection with most types of non-finite verbs because they do **not** express the tense.)

The verbs are given first their personal endings and then their 'cumulative suffixes' (cf. above). Rules are stated concerning which allomorphic variants occur either obligatorily or optatively together with which 'euphonic affixes' (cf. above). The optative and the imperative are mentioned, but not treated in a systematic way. Thus, the verb endings to be discussed are (in the modern terminology) those of the indicative.

*Collatikaaram* states that there are three tenses (= 'past', 'present', 'future'), expressed by three distinct markings. According to the modern scholarship, however, there are only two formally marked tenses in Ancient

Tamil, namely the preterite (= ‘past’) and the non-preterite (= ‘present’ & ‘future’). The commentary illustrates the purported three-way distinction with the following examples:

uṛ-t-aan eat-PRET-SG3&M	=	‘he ate’
uṛṇaa-niṇr-aan eat-PRES-SG3&M	=	‘he is eating’
uṛ-p-aan eat-FUT-SG3&M	=	‘he will eat’

It is obvious at once that the present form is a periphrastic expression and, as such, not on an equal footing with the two other forms. It was originally constituted by the (active) participle (also called ‘absolute’ and ‘conjunctive’) of the verb ‘eat’ plus the preterite of the verb *niṭ-*, which means ‘stand’. (The underlying idea is something like ‘he has come to a standstill to eat, so now he is eating’.) There is an alternative form *uṛ-kiṇr-aan* originally constituted by the root of the verb ‘eat’ plus the preterite of the verb *kil-*, which means ‘be able’. (The idea is ‘he was able to eat, so now he is eating’.) It is this form which is at the origin of the present in Modern Tamil with the marking *kkar*. As other possibilities, the commentary mentions the forms *uṇṇaa-kiṭa-nt-aan* and *uṇṇaay-iru-nt-aan*, which are constituted by the participle of the verb ‘eat’ plus the preterite of either the verb *kiṭa-* (‘lie’) or the verb *iru-* (‘sit’). (The idea is ‘he has lied/sat down to eat’.) Afterwards the verb *iru-* has bleached to become the verb ‘be’ of Modern Tamil; and today some aspect or tense forms may simultaneously contain two *iru-* affixes. — This gives only a vague idea about how fruitful it could be to study the development ‘Ancient Tamil > Modern Tamil’ from the vantage point of grammaticalization (ks. Lehmann 1994: 84; Chevillard 1996: 304–309).

Because the present form — unlike the preterite and future forms — is periphrastic, it seems that Tolkaappiyanaar has wished, in the name of some sort of ‘general logic’, to postulate the three principal tenses ‘past’, ‘present’, and ‘future’ in Ancient Tamil, although the language itself does not directly validate this three-way distinction. On the other hand, it has to be recalled that the notion of ‘tense system’ is not as clear-cut as one would like to think. It happens much too often that only such forms are accepted as ‘genuine’ tenses where the orthography writes the tense marking as part of the verb (ks.



Itkonen 1997: 99–104).

The modern scholarship divides the verbs of Ancient (and Modern) Tamil into conjugations on the basis of the preterite markings, mainly *-nt-* or *-(t)t-*, and of the present/future markings *-v-* or *-(p)p-*. Therefore it is somewhat odd that this phenomenon is not mentioned in *Tolkaappiyam*. The same is true of the passive, which is formed with the (auxiliary) verb *paṭu-* ('undergo', 'suffer').

Special attention is devoted to the treatment of the 'implicit' verb. This construction is indeed one of the peculiarities of Ancient Tamil. An adjective or a noun may be transformed into a verb simply by adding the personal endings. This type of verb is 'implicit' in the sense that it does not express tense (so to this purpose, temporal adverbs are needed). An implicit verb derived from an adjective *A* means 'X (= I, you, he, etc.) is *A*', whereas an implicit verb derived from a noun *N* means 'X is *N*', 'X has *N*', or 'X is in *N*'. Let us consider verb forms derived from the adjective *nal* ('good') and from the nouns *peṇṭu* ('woman'), *tool* ('shoulder'), and *kaana* ('forest'):

nall-aan = 'he is good'  
good-SG3&M

nall-eem = 'we are good'  
good-PL1

peṇṭ-aal = 'she is a woman'  
woman-SG3&F

peṇṭ-iir-eem = 'we are women'  
woman-PL-PL1

tool-aan = 'he has (big) shoulders'  
shoulder-SG3&M

tool-eem = 'we have (big) shoulders'  
shoulder-PL1

kaanav-aan = 'he is in a forest'  
forest-SG3&M

kaanav-eem = 'we are in a forest'  
forest-PL1

This construction is interesting because it **also** has the nominal meaning ‘he who is good’, ‘we who are good’, ‘she who is a woman’ etc. In its nominal use this construction inflects in case and number just like any other noun. For instance, starting from the form *kaanav-aan*, one gets a regular accusative *kaanav-aan-ai* (‘him who is in the forest’).

This ambivalent construction has its counterpart among the ‘explicit’ verbs. There are four different ways to derive from these a (non-finite) construction which Lehmann (1994: 137–142) calls ‘participial noun’. One of these (which also happens to be the most frequent) is identical with the corresponding finite form, and thus inflects also in person. For instance the form *va-nt-aan*, which we have encountered in the meaning ‘he came’, can also have the meaning ‘he who came’. And in this use it inflects like a noun; for instance, the accusative is *va-nt-aan-ai*.

All the verbs are ‘implicit’ when they express negation because the marking of negation occupies the same place (*viz.* between the root and the personal ending) as the marking of tense, with the consequence that negation and tense exclude each other. (Interestingly, the most frequent form of this type of morphological negation is the **zero** morph.) There are two verbs *il-* and *al-* which mean ‘not-being’, and they too are incapable of expressing the tense. This asymmetry between affirmation and negation goes back to the Dravidian protolanguage. — The systematic attention which both *Collatikaaram* and the commentary devote to the construction which is both a verb and a noun testifies to the fact that it was felt to be puzzling. This is easy to understand, considering that, as stated before, the noun–verb distinction is the basis of morphosyntactic description.

Next, we shall move on to the non-finite verbs. In Ancient (and Modern) Tamil the structure of the complex sentence is such that it contains only one finite verb which is placed at the end of the sentence. Thus, the coordination of sentences does not exist (apart from some marginal cases). The term for non-finite verbs *eccam* literally means ‘lack’, i.e. they lack something that would make them complete. This is either a verb or a noun, and accordingly, non-finite verbs are subdivided into adverbial and adnominal ones, i.e. ‘lack of verb’ and ‘lack of noun’, respectively. The adverbial forms (which are placed at the end of their own constructions) have many functions, and there is a great amount of allomorphic variation between forms that perform one and the same function. As might be expected, the most important functions are temporal, final, causal, consecutive, conditional, and concessive. Their most important

means of expression are retained in Modern Tamil. *Collatikaaram* is content to enumerate the basic types and add that the agent of the adverbial construction must be identical with the agent of the main clause. The commentary offers a much more elaborate classification.

The adnominal verb-form performs the function of the relative construction. Again, there is a great deal of allomorphic variation (and again, this construction is retained in Modern Tamil.) One and the same form is flexible enough to express all semantic roles, according to the following pattern (where *X* stands for the adnominal marking):

forest-LOC axe-INSTR tiger-ACC kill-X man =  
‘The man who killed the tiger with an axe in the forest’

man-NOM axe-INSTR forest-LOC kill-X tiger =  
‘The tiger which the man killed with an axe in a forest’

man-NOM forest-LOC tiger-ACC kill-X axe =  
‘The axe with which the man killed a tiger in a forest’

man-NOM forest-LOC tiger-ACC kill-X forest =  
‘The forest where the man killed a tiger with an axe’

To be sure, most often the case endings are deleted, which may give rise to ambiguities. For instance, the following example may mean either ‘elephant which killed a tiger’ or ‘elephant which a tiger killed’:

puli konra yaanai  
tiger kill&REL elephant

This type of construction may be disambiguated by the following verb; for instance, continuations like ‘came here’ and ‘was lying on the ground’ would produce the two opposite interpretations. Just like in connection with nouns expressing various semantic roles, the adnominal verb-form too may be simply replaced by the root, which gives a certain freedom to interpret the resulting construction (= ‘tiger kill elephant’) either as a phrase or as a compound, i.e. either *puli kol yaanai* or *puli-kol-yaanai*.

### 3.2.6. Chapters 7–9

The seventh chapter makes use of lists to deal with the first type of non-independent ‘words’ (*col*), namely affixes, clitics, and sentence particles. As an example, we may choose *-um*, which is one of the most usual clitics. It is stated to express the following meanings: ‘and’, ‘even’, ‘surely not?’, ‘or maybe not’, ‘that’s all’, ‘precisely’ as well as enumerating and concluding. At the end of the chapter, to be sure, it is wisely pointed out that in reality the units under discussion may be divided into two subgroups, namely those whose meanings can and those whose meanings cannot be defined exactly. The eighth chapter deals with the second type of non-independent ‘words’, namely roots. In practice this means concentrating on the special vocabulary needed in poetry. The ninth and final chapter bears the title ‘The rest’, and it contains disparate observations that apparently could not be accommodated in the preceding chapters.

It is evident that in *Collatikaaram* the emphasis is on morphology. As mentioned above, syntax is treated in a somewhat disconnected fashion in chapters 1, 6, and 9. The classification of sentence types is given in chapter 2 in connection with those ‘predicates’ (to use a Western term) which can follow a nominative. Therefore it is difficult to agree with Sastri (1945: xiii, 2), who asserts that the first four chapters deal with syntax while the remaining chapters deal with morphology. The notion of ‘indirect speech act’ (to use a modern term) is presented in several chapters: it is inherent to language that you can say one thing and mean another.

### 3.3. Book Three

My most important source concerning the third book of *Tolkaappiyam*, i.e. *Poruḷatikaaram*, is Sastri (1949–1956). At the beginning of the first chapter the general framework of Ancient Tamil poetry is presented in a very succinct fashion. The entities (*poruḷ*) of the universe are divided into three classes: space-time; emotions plus the corresponding situations; things with their properties. These three classes will now be unfolded in order.

Space is divided into five subtypes: mountains, wasteland, forest, seashore, meadow. To these five spatial regions there correspond five units of time, at the level both of the year and of the day: autumn and midnight; spring/summer and midday; winter and sunset; whole year and afternoon;

whole year and morning.

To these five space-time units there correspond the following five stages characteristic of any genuine love relationship: union, separation, cheerful waiting, anxious waiting, quarrel (caused by the man's infidelity). In this way, five combinations of space-time and emotion have come into being. (For instance, the union of the two lovers takes place on a mountain in an autumnal midnight-hour.) Each of the five combinations has its own exponent in each of the following nine (or more) subcategories of the superordinate category 'thing': god, food, beast, tree, bird, drum, type of population, melody of harp, flower, "and so on". For instance, when the lovers are united on their mountain in an autumnal midnight-hour, their union takes place under the auspices of a certain god, they are surrounded by the characteristic flora and fauna of the region, they hear a certain type of music, and they are at least aware of the type of people who inhabit the region. Thus, the third book of *Tolkaappiyam* achieves a remarkable synthesis of the internal and external situation of a member of the Ancient Tamil culture, while ostensibly aiming at a much more modest target, namely discussing the nature of love poetry.

The resulting five totalities represent the different aspects of 'correct love' (*akam*). (Originally, *akam* means 'inside', and it is one of the 19 postpositions mentioned in connection with the locative; gradually, it has also come to mean 'mind', 'love', and 'love poetry'.) 'Correct love' is sharply distinguished from 'incorrect love', which, being characteristic of servants and slaves, is divided into two subtypes: either it is unrequited or there is between the partners an age difference which produces an excessive amount of lasciviousness. Furthermore, reasons are given which justify a temporary separation: study, warfare, activity at embassies, acquiring wealth, setting right misdemeanours that have occurred in temples.

The five-part cosmology postulates a structural symmetry or **analogy** between space-time, emotions, and things. This figure of thought is essential to the human mind, and therefore its exemplifications are bound to occur, more or less systematically, in all cultures, e.g. in Hinduism, neo-Confucianism, Islam, and the Stoic philosophy of Ancient Greece (cf. Itkonen 1991: 7, 117–118, 161, 189). Already 20 years ago, when describing the role of analogy in the cosmology of Classical Hinduism, Parpola (1980: 202) made the following perspicacious remark: "In my opinion this fact has not received the attention it deserves."

Thus, the first chapter of the third book deals with love poetry under the

heading of *akam*. The second chapter deals with the other type of poetry under the heading of *puram*. (Originally *puram* means ‘outside’, and it too figures in the list of spatial prepositions; it has come to mean ‘public life’, and ‘heroic poetry’ in particular.) Because there are seven distinct subtypes of love (including incorrect love), the same number of topics must be distinguished in the *puram* poetry (although it is difficult to detect any analogy between the respective contents): stealing cattle from the enemy; occupying a fortress; two distinct stages in a fight between two kings; the duties of the different castes and their eulogy; mortality and the proper attitude towards death; praising a king for money. — Zvelebil (1973: chap. 6) gives an overview of the *Weltanschauung* of *cankam* poetry.

Love poetry becomes again the topic of the following chapters. The third chapter deals with entering into a marriage without the consent of the parents, which involves secret meetings, eloping, etc. The different stages of falling in love and of courtship are described in great detail. In addition to the two lovers, the central personages include the man’s friend, the woman’s confidante, and the woman’s foster mother. The situations in which it is proper for each of them to speak are enumerated and portrayed at length.

The topic of the fourth chapter is the married life, whether the marriage has had the approval of the parents or not. (Thus, contrary to what is often the case in the West, the description of a love relationship does not end at the moment when ‘they get each other’.) Now the central personages are the husband, the wife, the wife’s confidante, and the husband’s ‘faithful mistress’. The number of the situations in which each of them should speak is 33, 21, 19, and 8, respectively. The instructions for the prospective poet are extremely detailed, as can be seen from the following example. The eleventh situation where the wife should speak is the one where she is playing with her child, without knowing that the husband (and father) is standing right behind her, regretting his infidelity and hoping for a reconciliation, so that he himself could reclaim his rightful place as the head of the family.

The wife’s right to feel bitter is freely admitted; but relatives and — in more serious cases — learned men are called upon to appease her and to make her see where her duty lies. Because it is not proper for a wife to reveal her husband’s foibles, her honour is inseparable from the honour of his mistress. Finally, the story of the marriage is steered towards its inevitable conclusion: “The fruit of what is said before is that the husband and the wife, having spent after their youth their time with their children in prosperous conditions and

with their righteous relatives, have to think of *moksa*” (i.e. the liberation that one — hopefully — achieves after one’s death).

The fifth chapter deals with the non-literal use of language proper to poetry: indirect speech acts, irony, metaphor, and dreams. (Remember that metonymy was discussed already in the third chapter of the second bok.) The sixth chapter analyzes the psychology of love: starting from a general classification of feelings, it is explained what are the external signs of love (and of its concealment) in different situations. The seventh chapter treats of similes. The eighth chapter treats of prosody characteristic of poetic language. In the ninth chapter the meanings of words that are either outdated or in the process of becoming outdated are explained; most of these words refer to male or female animals or to their offspring. It seems fitting that *Tolkaappiyam* should conclude with a consideration of the relation between the original text and the commentary. The last rule states that a good commentary is the result of a process that contains 35 distinct stages.

#### 4. Conclusion

At first, it may seem that *Tolkaappiyam* combines in an illicit way elements that should be kept separate. Zvelebil (1992: 129–132) emphasizes, however, that what we have here is a synthesizing perspective peculiar to the Tamil culture (and more generally to the Indian culture). In point of fact, *Tolkaappiyam* describes **norms** at three distinct levels: first, the norms of speaking, which constitute the subject matter of the first two books; second, the norms of composing poetry, which constitute the ostensible subject matter of the third book; third, the norms of behavior whose existence is presupposed by the norms of poetry. In each case, the norms regulate some area of actual behavior, i.e. speech, poetry, and love life. *Tolkaappiyam* is simultaneously a ‘grammar’ of all three areas; thus, it is also ‘a grammar of love’. The description of norms pertaining to the three areas takes the form of rules (*sūtra*). It is precisely this type of synthesis that Western semioticians have eagerly (and vainly) sought after during the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Getting acquainted with *Tolkaappiyam* brings many benefits. The most important of these is of a rather general nature. As far as I can see, modern theoretical linguistics is characterized by an appalling lack of the sense of history and by the superficiality that inevitably ensues from it. Maybe this situation is beyond repair. To the extent that it is not, the best antidote is to get

acquainted with vigorous and systematic thinking about language that took place a long time ago. Just like the classical grammars of the other traditions, *Tolkaappiyam* invalidates our ingrained views about ‘progress in linguistics’ (and about ‘scientific progress’ more generally). Accordingly, this article confirms and complements the thesis of Itkonen (1991).

Another more specific benefit may be mentioned. *Tolkaappiyam* reminds us of the fact, characteristic of the Indian culture in general, that both the artistic and the scientific traditions were originally created in an oral form and that, even after being written down, they continued to be orally transmitted from one generation to the next. In particular, this is true of Pāṇini’s grammar. It is extremely significant that the best grammar in the world, which — in addition — is one of the most ‘algebraic’ in its manner of presentation, was created without the help of a written language (cf. Masica 1991: 134–136; Itkonen 1991: 12–14). By contrast, the first book of *Tolkaappiyam* contains references to written signs. Nevertheless, as Zvelebil (1973) repeatedly points out, the great works of the Tamil culture were transmitted by means of oral (and not just written) tradition. Rubin (1995) seems to be the first to have analyzed in detail the techniques that make it possible to maintain an oral tradition. However (as I have privately pointed out to him), he trivializes his own thesis when he restricts the notion of ‘oral tradition’ to artistic works. In the recent decades, an entire scholarly subdiscipline has been founded on the assumption that **literacy** is the necessary basis of any type of higher culture. Interestingly, this assumption happens to be false.

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