

# The Structural Tendencies of a Developing Language— With Reference to Tamil

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## 1. Scholar's View on the Direction of Language Development

The earth we live on never stays still; likewise, every aspect found on the earth also keeps undergoing changes, whether they be slow or fast. Landscapes, civilisations and cultures are ever-changing with the passage of time. Changes are to be received with pleasure. If not for changes, especially the progressive ones, man would not have reached the present level of achievement and progress in all aspects of his life. Language, one aspect of culture, is also no exception to the general rule of the dynamic world.

When a language undergoes change, certain forms are lost and certain forms are introduced; besides there will be modifications on the existing forms. In the process of changing some languages seem to develop while some seem to deteriorate. Generally, there seems to be a correlation between a language, and the culture and civilisation of its speakers. When a language speaking group keeps advancing and progressing, its language also would expand and progress to satisfy the needs of its speakers. On the contrary, if a particular group's culture is fading away its language too, would be more on the dying side. The general parallelism between language development and that of the corresponding culture and civilisation is quite obvious that some scholars claim a correlation between the kind of syntactic structure of a language and the level of the corresponding civilisation.

Languages are generally classified into three different groups according to their structures, namely, isolating/analytic, agglutinative and flexional. It would be of use to represent Jespersen's definitions for these three types of languages at this point:

- I. Here meaning is the only thing indicated by sound; relation is merely suggested by word-position: isolating languages.
- II. Both meaning and relation are expressed by sound, but the formal elements are visibly tacked on to the root, which is itself invariable: agglutinating languages.
- III. The elements of meaning and of relation are fused together or absorbed into a higher unity, the root being susceptible of inward modification as well as of affixes to denote form: flexional languages" (1969:76).

Some scholars are of the opinion that languages develop in the direction, isolating -----> agglutinative -----> flexional while others believe that the development takes place in the reverse direction. This fact can be seen clearly in the following words of Jespersen:

“Now, according to Schleicher the three classes of languages are not only found simultaneously in the tongues of our own day, but they represent three stages of linguistic development; ... Beyond the flexional stage no language can attain: the symbolic denotation of relation by flexion is the highest accomplishment of language; speech has here effectually realised its object, which is to give a faithful phonetic image of thought. But before a language can become flexional it must have passed through an isolating and an agglutinating period. Is this theory borne out by historical facts? Can we trace back any of the existing flexional languages to agglutination and isolation? Schleicher himself answers this question in the negative; the earliest Latin was of as good a flexional type as are the modern Romanic languages” (1969: 76-77).

One more scholar, Valter Tauli, says thus:

“As should be apparent from the above, analytic as well as synthetic tendencies exist in all language groups” (1958:178).

Nevertheless, his general discussion on the structural tendencies of languages seems to hint at the fact that, “The tendency toward loss of concrete grammatical categories and simplification of morphology is in general stronger in the languages of more highly civilised peoples.” (Ibid: 39). As for the complicated nature of primitive people’s languages, he says, “The languages of peoples at the most primitive stage of culture seem to be complicated in their great majority. (Ibid: 34). He also shows one example where according to E. Faris, “it is possible in one of the Bantu languages of Equatorial Congo to derive more than 5000 different words from the verb root tung- ‘bind’.” (Ibid: 38).

Valter Tauli effectively exemplifies this hypothesis by means of Indo-European and other languages. The following extracts from his book indicate how the analytic tendency is clearly seen in the cases and verbs of the Indo-European languages:

“The analytic tendency can be documented most extensively in the IE languages. As regards the noun, the analytic tendency manifests itself in the replacing of cases by pre- or postpositional expressions and word-order (the latter replacing mainly the accusative and dative cases)” (1958: 58).

“The extinction of cases is complete in some languages, e.g. in the more important Romance languages, in Persian and in Bulgarian, whereas e.g. in English and Swedish only the genitive has survived. In German the function of cases has been transferred from noun endings to prepositions as well as partly to the article. ... In Afrikaans, too, all cases have been replaced by prepositional expressions” (Ibid: 59).

“Although in the IE languages the prepositions and postpositions existed already prior to the loss of inflexion, the increasing number of prepositions and the disappearance of inflexions manifest a clear tendency toward analysis in the morphology of the IE noun” (Ibid: 59).

“As regards the verb, the IE languages reveal a tendency to replace the use of suffixes for indicating the person, which still occurred in Latin and Gothic, by pronouns placed before the verb, the verb tending to remain unchanged i.e. the personal suffixes manifest a tendency to disappear” (Ibid: 62).

The foregoing paragraphs strengthen the fact that languages tend to become more and more analytical as they develop. Valter Tauli says that according to some, the Chinese language also had been a flexional language originally. He says, “Some authors are of the opinion that synthetic flexion has formerly also occurred in Chinese. B. Karlgren, basing his standpoint on the subject and object forms of the 1st and 2nd person pronouns in Old Chinese, which phenomenon also occurs in Burmese, assumes that Proto-Chinese was a flexional language of whose declension some remnants have survived only in pronouns, just as all that French has retained of the Latin declension is pronoun forms like *je:me*” (1958 71-72).

Hence, it seems quite plausible to support the hypothesis that languages develop in the direction, flexional -----> agglutinative -----> analytic.

## 2. The Analytic Tendency in the Tamil Language

Even the Tamil language, which is generally considered to be conservative, seems to give good evidence for the present hypothesis that languages become more analytical as they develop. A brief glance at a few aspects of Tamil grammar, viz., cases, negative verbs, appellative verbs, causatives and comparative and conditional constructions, would show that this language also is in the process of becoming analytic. A general discussion of these aspects will show by itself the validity of the present hypothesis as far as the Tamil language is concerned.



## 2.1. The Cases

The analytic tendency of Tamil can be seen in the third, fourth, fifth and the sixth cases. According to the traditional grammar, the suffixes used to indicate these cases are, -a:l, -ku, -in and -atu respectively.

One of the two major meanings of the suffix, -a:l, is 'instrumental':

1. avan pe:na:va:l elutina:n  
'He wrote with pen'.

Sentence 1 can be rewritten as following also:

- 1A. avan pe:na:vai-kkonṭu/vaittu\*/eṭuttu/  
-p-payanpaṭutti elutina:n

\*(When 'vaittu' is used in 'avan kattivaitsu vetṭina:n' its use seems more convincing)

A comparison of sentences 1 and 1A would show that the suffix, a:l, can be conveniently alternated with the words (if not particles), konṭu 'having', vaittu 'keeping', eṭuttu 'taking' and payanpaṭutti 'using'. These words indicate the instrumental use of the thing (pen in this case) very explicitly. These alternations can be used even in the other shades of the instrumental meaning like 'material', etc.:

2. avan maṇṇa:l kuṭam ceyta:n  
'He made the pot out of earth'.

- 2A. avan maṇṇai -k-konṭu/vaittu/eṭuttu/-p-payanpaṭuttik kuṭam ceyta:n.  
When the suffix, -ku, is used in the meaning, 'for the sake of', it can be replaced by -ku + a:ka or poruṭṭu:

3. avan ku:likku ve:lai ceyta:n  
'He worked for (the sake of) wage'.

- 3A. avan ku:likka:ka/ku:liyiṇ poruṭṭu ve:lai ceyta:n.

The suffix, -ku, alone cannot be used to convey the meaning, 'for the sake of' in certain contexts in Modern Tamil:

4. na:n unakku inta ve:laiyaic ceyte:n  
4A. na:n unakka:ka/un poruṭṭu inta ve:laiyaic ceyte:n.  
'I did the work for your sake'.

In fact, the word, poruṭṭu, has the direct meaning, 'for the sake of'.

The fifth case suffix, -in, has been totally replaced by the particle, iruntu in Modern Tamil. Moreover, this particle indicates the ablative function alone whereas -in is used to indicate, both the ablative as well as comparative/contrastive functions:

5. paḷam marattiliruntu viḷuntatu.  
'The fruit fell from the tree.'
6. avan taṅ tantaiyitamiruntu paṇam peṇṇaṅ.  
'He received the money from his father.'
7. malaiyṅ viḷ aruvi.  
'The stream that flows from the mountain.'
8. avaiṅ ivan periyāṅ.  
'This boy is bigger than that one.'

As for the sixth case suffix, atu, it has the alternants, -in, and -utaiya in Modern Tamil. The particle, -utaiya, seems to be the most popular genitive marker in Modern Tamil; -in is rarely used with pronouns.

9. avanatu/avan/avanutaiya/\*avaiṅ puttakam  
'His book'.

Hence the Tamil cases show their analytic tendency quite clearly.

## 2.2. The Negative Verbs

As early as 1957, M. Varadarajan had clearly indicated the analytic tendency of Tamil as far as the negative verbs are concerned. In his article, 'The Analytic Tendency in Tamil', he has shown how the one form, ceyvavillai 'did not do', has replaced the nine old forms:

ceytilaṅ/ceykinṅilaṅ	'he did/does not do'
ceytila/ceykinṅila	'she did/does not do'
ceytilar/ceykinṅilar	'they (human) did/do not do'
ceytilatu/ceykinṅilatu	'it did/does not do'
ceytila/ceykinṅila	'they (non-human) did/do not do'
ceytile:ṅ/ceykinṅile:ṅ	'I did/do not do'
ceytile:m/ceykinṅile:m	'We did/do not do'

ceytilai/ceykinrilai

'You (sg) did/do not do'

ceytilir/ceykinrilir

'You (pl) did/do not do'

He says thus: "the old rigid forms, which express small subordinate distinctions, are no more of any practical value for clearness of thought and expression. The modern forms seem to have attained freedom from an artificial burden. One modern form represents nine different forms used by the contemporaries of Tiruvalluvar. The change is towards simplicity and regularity; word-order is being used as grammatical device. This new mechanism of expressing the negative seems to be simpler and easier" (1957: 18).

The negative verb, ma:tt 'will not' also has to be taken note of at this point. This verb needs the suffixation of the appropriate personal suffixes and it occurs only in the future tense:

10. avan varama:tta:n

'He will not come.'

This form replaces the older forms such as va:ra:n 'he will not come.'

Hence, in the case of modern negative verbs, the tendency to express one grammatical idea by one separate form is seen, viz., vara indicates the act and illai/ma :tt -expresses the negation; in the old verb, the form, va:ra :n, itself conveys both the ideas.

M. Varadarajan mentions one more benefit due to the modern negative form. He says, "There is an advantage in the analytic structure, viz., there is facility to express certain minute shades of thought by laying extra stress on any one of the three elements in the sentence.

<u>avan</u> ceyya(v) illai	no stress
<u>avane:</u> ceyya(v) illai	} stress on the subject
<u>avanta:n</u> ceyya(v) illai	
<u>avan</u> ceyyave:illai	} stress on the action
<u>avan</u> ceyyatta:n illai	
<u>avan</u> ceyya(v) illaiye:	stress on the negation

These three minute shades of thought are now expressible by accentuating or adding a particle of emphasis to either the subject or the action or the negation. This is not possible in the old synthetic form" (1957:19).

In this context, it will be of use to note that the increase in the number of Tamil auxiliary verbs is also a concrete step towards the analytic tendency. The use of auxiliary verbs aids in the expression of minute shades of the verbal meaning as regards its moods and aspects.

### 2.3. The Appellative Verbs

The appellative verbs, which were very popularly used in Old Tamil, are now almost extinct. The appellative verbs are obtained by affixing personal suffixes to the noun base on the basis of possession, location, comparison or quality (Tolka:ppiyam: 698).<sup>1</sup>

In Modern Tamil such verbs are written by using the 'N+ai+uṭai-', 'N+il+va:l-', or 'N(quality) + noun derivative suffix' respectively:

11. avan ponnan  
'He possesses wealth.'
- 11A. avan ponnai uṭaiyavan  
'He is one who has wealth.'
12. avan malaiyan  
'He lives in the mountain.'
- 12A. avan malaiyil va:lavan  
'He is one who lives in the mountain.'
13. avaḷ nam kaṇṇannaḷ  
'She is like our eyes.'
- 13A. avaḷ nam kaṇ po:ṇṇavaḷ  
'She is one, like our eyes.'
14. avan nallan  
'He is good.'
- 14A. avan nallavan  
'He is a good man/boy.'

At present the use of appellative verbs is not appreciated because they are easily interpreted and understood as the adjectival nouns:

nallan -----> nallavan; kariyan -----> kariyavan

Even one has to make a careful study of the old literature in order to identify the appellative verbs from the corresponding nouns. Hence, it can be said that the analytical tendency of Modern Tamil has helped to avoid the confusion that exists in this aspect of the grammar.



#### 2.4. Causatives

Causative verbs in Tamil are generally derived by using suffixes like, -vi and -pi, to the verbal roots (Nannu:1: 138):

15. ceyvi 'get (something) done by (someone)'.

16. paṭippi 'teach'/'make (someone) learn'.

In modern Tamil the causatives are derived by adding the auxiliary verbs, -vai 'keep' or -cey 'make', to the infinitive forms of the intended verb:

15A. ceyya vai 'make (someone) do'.

16A. paṭikkac cey  
paṭikka vai 'make (someone) learn'.

#### 2.5. The Comparative Constructions

The fifth case suffix, -in, is supposed to perform the contrastive function also, according to traditional grammar. (Nannu:1: 299):

17. unnil avan nallan  
'He is nicer than you'.

In Modern Tamil, contrastive particles like viṭa-pa:rkkilum or ka:ṭilum are used together with the noun occurring together with the suffix, -ai:

17A. unnai viṭa/ka:ṭilum/pa:rkkilum avan nallavan.

#### 2.6. The Conditional Constructions

Conditional verbs are derived by affixing the suffixes, -ai, to the verbal stem:

18. avan iṅku varil/varin/vanta:l na:n ankup po:ve:n.  
'If he comes here, I will go there'.

Though the form, vanta:l is very commonly used in Modern Tamil, other analytic forms such as vanta:n a:na:l/a:yin/a:kil/enra:l are also frequently used in the same:

18A. avan iṅku vanta:n a:na:l/a:kil/a:yin/ enra:l na:n ankup po:ve:n



The conditional construction seems to be moving towards the analytic structure.

2.7. The brief discussion of the six aspects of Tamil grammar clearly indicates that the Tamil language is also developing towards the analytic direction. It is to be reminded that this paper has only done a very, general, preliminary observation of the analytic tendency in Tamil so as to make one well aware of the fact that the Tamil language is also developing in the same direction as that of most other languages. In other words, the Tamil language also seems to support the hypothesis about the direction of structural changes in developing languages, namely, inflectional -----> agglutinative -----> analytic. While trying to confirm his verdict that the analytic tendency is universal, Jespersen gives a very good account of a variety of languages thus convincing the readers that the present hypothesis is quite true.<sup>4</sup>

### 3. A Further Justification — The Progressive Man Himself

The general nature of man also seems to agree with the analytic tendency of languages. Man becomes more and more analytical in his outlook and requires precision in every aspect of life. Even in phonology, anyone finds it easy to read a language such as Malay where one symbol represents one and only one sound as against a language like English whose alphabetic system is not the least phonemic. As far as the technical equipments are concerned, they become more self-explanatory with the passage of time; the parts of the modern electrical equipments are clearly labelled and the necessary instructions are also inserted as far as possible. These indicate how man is seen to have everything clearly expressed that he would not have to waste his time and energy in sorting out things. Hence, he would want to make his language also as simple and explicit as possible. A second language teacher would fully be aware of the benefits of having a systemised, simple language. Jespersen also considers the analytical tendency to be a progressive one. He says, "and we have shown reasons for the conviction that this development has on the whole and in the main been a beneficial one, thus justifying us in speaking about progress in language" (1969: 364). In fact, he lists down seven good points of the modern languages.<sup>5</sup>

In this context, it will be interesting to note that the Malayalam verbs without the personal suffixes must be a later development. M. Varadarajan also says, "It is generally said that the finite verbs in Malayalam originally had these pronominal terminations and only in course of time lost them. Even now, in the dialects of some tribal people who are not advanced in civilisation and live far from cities and of the inhabitants of the Laccadives, the finite verbs retain these terminations. The ancient Malayalam poetry freely uses them" (1957: 15-16).

#### 4. Conclusion

Before concluding, it has to be reminded that languages will have some synthetic tendencies also at all times. This can be attributed to man's eagerness to find quick and efficient means of doing things that he would tend to synthesise certain items which occur together frequently, viz., varala:kum -----> varala:m in Tamil. Nevertheless, the analytic tendency seems to be in better accordance with the attitude and expectations of a progressive man. The Tamil language, too, seems to be no exception to such progressive tendencies.

#### Foot Notes

1. atuccol ve:rumai utaimai ya:rum  
kaṇeṇ ve:rumai nilatti na:rum  
oppi na:rum paṇpi na:rumenru  
appa:l ka:lam kuṛippeṭu to:rum (Tol: 698)
2. ceyyeṇ viṇaivali vippi taṇivariṅ  
ceyyiyeṇ ne:va liṇaiyiṇi: re:val (Nan: 138)
3. ainta: vataṅguru pillu miṇṇum  
ni:ṇ kalop pella: ye:tup poruḷe. (Nan: 299)
4. 'But is this tendency really general, or even universal, in the world of languages? It will easily be seen that my examples have in the main been taken from comparatively few languages, those with which I myself and presumably most of my readers are most familiar, all of them belonging to the Gothic and Romanic branches of the Aryan family. Would the same theory hold good with regard to other languages? Without pretending to have an intimate knowledge of the history of many languages, I yet dare assert that my conclusions are confirmed by all those languages whose history is accessible to us. Colloquial Irish and Gaelic have in many ways a simpler grammatical structure than the oldest Irish. Russian has got rid of some of the complications of Old Slavonic, and the same is true, even in a much higher degree, of some of the other Slavonic languages; thus Bulgarian has greatly simplified its nominal and Serbian its verbal flexions. The grammar of spoken Modern Greek is much less complicated than that of the language of Homer or Demosthenes. The structure of Modern Persian is nearly as simple as English, though that of Old Persian was highly complicated. In India we witness a constant simplification of grammar from Sanskrit through Prakrit and Pali to the modern languages, Hindi, Hindustani (Urdu), Bengali, etc. Outside the Aryan

world we see the same movement: Hebrew is simpler and more regular than Assyrian, and spoken Arabic than the old classical language. Koptic than Old Egyptian' (Jespersen, 1969: 365).

5. 'The points in which the superiority of the modern languages manifested itself were the following:
  - (1) The forms are generally shorter, thus involving less muscular exertion and requiring less time for their enunciation.
  - (2) There are not so many of them to burden the memory.
  - (3) Their formation is much more regular.
  - (4) Their syntactic use also presents fewer irregularities.
  - (5) Their more analytic and abstract character facilitates expression by rendering possible a great many combinations and constructions which were formerly impossible or unidiomatic.
  - (6) The clumsy repetitions known under the name of concord have become superfluous.
  - (7) A clear and unambiguous understanding is secured through a regular word order (Jespersen, 1969: 364)

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