Discursive and Non-Discursive Speech in the Structure of Tamil Grammar

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Introduction

This paper discusses how the opposition of discursive speech and non-discursive speech figures in the organization of Tamil grammar. I examine the distribution of grammatical categories in these two kinds of utterance, as well as other grammatical oppositions, to see how various forms fit their contexts. Confirmation of some of the patterns that emerge is found in different historical stages of Tamil or in related languages. As I suggest, we can better interpret linguistic expressions when we frame them in these larger contexts.

1. Discursive Speech versus Non-Discursive Speech

It is a commonplace of modern linguistics that we best understand the meaning and use of a particular linguistic form when we understand how it is embedded in the larger linguistic system in which it participates. The theme of this paper is to interpret grammatical forms of Tamil by examining how they are used within larger linguistic systems. These larger linguistic systems include the opposition of what I call discursive versus non-discursive speech, the overarching grammar of Tamil, and the comparative grammar of Dravidian linguistics.

While the terms *narrative* and *text* have currency in disciplines outside linguistics, I will focus on a linguistic characterization of what I call non-discursive speech by comparing it with discursive speech. This distinction follows Benveniste's (1966) own division of what he called *discours* and

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histoire, if with a more narrow focus.[1] Indeed, while these terms are usually translated in English as 'discourse' and 'narrative' (or 'history' or 'story'), in this paper I use the terms *discursive* and *non-discursive* speech to capture what is relevant about Benveniste's distinction for my argument. (In particular, the use of the term *non-discursive speech* for *narrative* is preferred because the latter term has diverse meanings in adjacent fields such as sociology, anthropology, history, media studies, and literary analysis—primarily related to genres and their categorization, be it in literary studies [novels, short stories, essays, etc.] or folklore studies [Märchen, legends, myths, etc.]—which are incidental to the central theme of the paper [though they were important to Benveniste's original arguments about French tense].) About *discours* and *histoire*, Benveniste writes:

> *Discourse* [here, discursive speech] is to be understood in its broadest extent as all utterances that presuppose a speaker and a listener, and with the former the intention of influencing the latter in some way… in short, all those genres where someone addresses himself to another, expresses himself as the speaker and organizes what he says according to the category of person. We define *histoire* [here, non-discursive speech] as the way to present an utterance which excludes all autobiographical linguistic forms… We recognize non-discursive speech strictly speaking only in forms of the "third person."

It was observed in Benveniste's discussion that speech can be organized along these two extremes of a continuum. Individual languages and specific genres may utilize various grammatical categories and organize them in relationship to different locations along that continuum.

In short, discursive speech is characterized by the presence of shifters (Jakobson 1971); non-discursive, by their absence. One corollary is that non-discursive speech typically has a smaller inventory of forms, paradigms, and constructions than is available to discursive speech and to the language as a whole. For example, Benveniste (1966) observes that in French, non-discursive speech has three basic tense-forms: an aorist, an imperfect and, occasionally, a present of definition while discursive speech has the full panoply of forms (minus the aorist) that students must master. Since there is no appeal to the speech event in non-discursive speech, these tense-forms do not actually signal tense (E^s/E^n, but taxis (E^n/E^n) or relative tense. Apart from the aorist (*passé simple*), which is mostly restricted to non-discursive speech, French has not developed separate tense-forms for the

two kinds of utterance. The precise interpretation of these forms thus requires that we analyze them relative to the larger contexts in which they occur.

As noted above, in a language that does not provide separate tense-forms for discursive and non-discursive speech, the *interpretation* of a given tense-form will differ according to the two kinds of utterance so that in non-discursive speech, they are interpreted as forms marking taxis, not tense. Similar variations in interpretation impact other shifters, in particular the category of person which Benveniste finds central to this basic distinction. The work of Erving Goffman (e.g., Goffman 1974), reveals that in the traditional pair "speaker–hearer," the term *speaker* conflates three roles that commonly coincide but may under certain circumstances be separated. The first role is *author*, the person who composes the words that are uttered. The second is *animator*, the person who produces the sound or other physical manifestation of the utterance. The third is *principal*, the person whose position is committed through the uttering of the sentence. (McCawley [1993:585] gives the following example of how the roles may differ. A speech writer [the author] writes a speech that is to be given by President Bush [the principal] but ends up being read in his absence by Vice President Quayle [the animator].) The disposition of these three roles likely varies according to the kind of utterance: in discursive speech all three are often united, while in non-discursive speech perhaps only the role of animator appears to be relevant. One important commitment that a principal makes in a cooperative conversation—a prime example of discursive speech—is to alternate the roles of speaker and hearer with the addressee.

In Tamil, as we will see, categories such as tense (E^s/E^n), person (P^s/P^n), and attitude (P^s/E^n) are absent from non-discursive speech (Steever 2002, 2005). Non-discursive speech tends to exclude Auxiliary Compound Verbs; personal pronouns—all shifters, in fact; address forms; emphatic lengthening; and the complete array of tense-forms in the language.

L'effectif

In non-discursive speech, events are presented as unfolding of their own accord, without the intervention of the participants in the speech event or, to a lesser extent, the participants in the narrated event. To express the

notion of this natural unfolding of events, Benveniste (1966:239–41) introduces to the concept of *l'éffectif*:

> [Nondiscursive speech] characterizes the narrative of past events. … It is a matter of present facts happening at a certain moment in time without any intervention by the speaker in the narrative … once they are set down and expressed in a historical expression, they are characterized as past.

Here, the "speaker" does not intervene as an author or principal, only as an animator. Benveniste writes:

> In this means of expression the succession of events and the essence of time are the same. There is no reason for them to change as long as the historical narrative proceeds; moreover, there is no reason for the narrative to stop since one may imagine the entire past of the world as a continuous narrative and which can be based on a threefold distinction of aorist, imperfect and past perfect. It is necessary and sufficient that the author remain true to his historical purpose and eliminate everything which is alien to the narration of events (address, reflection, comparisons). Truly speaking, there is no narrator. Events are presented as they develop to the extent they appear on the horizon of history. No one speaks here; events appear to narrate themselves. The basic tense is the aorist [= passé simple] which is the tense of an event outside the person of a narrator.

That is, there is no narrator in non-discursive speech that unites all three speaker roles: author, principal, and animator.

Since the narrative stream in non-discursive speech is given as natural, the use of connectors—grammatical categories with the general shape X/X—is minimal. For example, the use of taxis is downplayed in non-discursive speech. Consider the brace of examples below.

(1)a   *iravu pōy* (*AUX) *pakal   va-nt-atu*.
      night go-CF   daylight   come-pst-3NS
      'Night went and daylight came.'

  b   *viṭiyaṟkālaiyil vācalai.p   perukki.c* (*AUX) *cāṇi teḷittu* (*AUX)
      morning-LOC entrance-ACC sweep-CF   dung sprinkle-CF

      kōlam pōṭa   vēṇṭum.
      figure   put-INF need-FUT-3NS

'At daybreak, one must sweep the entrance, sprinkle it with dung and draw auspicious figures on it.'

c *mūñciyil muḷḷai veṭṭi.p* (*AUX) *pōṭuvēṉ*
   face-LOC thorn-ACC cut-CF   put-FUT-1S
   'I'll cut some thorns and shove 'em in your puss.'

In (1a) the simple verb *pōy* 'going' cannot normally be replaced by an auxiliary compound verb (ACV) such as *pōy viṭṭu* '(after) going', which signals disjunctive taxis, because nothing can ordinarily disturb the natural progression of night and day. Contexts may be generated, however, in which an ACV is permitted (2), such as in a sleep chamber in an experiment where "night" and "day" are regulated by human intervention.

(2) *iravu* ₐcᵥ[*pōy viṭṭu.p*] *pakal* *va-nt-atu.*
   night   go-CF leave-CF daylight come-pst-3NS
   'Night went and daylight came.'

The sequence of events in (1b) describes the steps of a domestic ritual to invoke the blessings of the goddess of prosperity. The steps cannot be varied and still be recognized as the same ritual. Hence, there can be no articulation points, represented by ACVs, at the steps of this ritual.

Example (1c) illustrates a threat. It mixes aspects of discursive and non-discursive speech. It has, for example, a first-person subject who is attempting to "influence" the hearer, which is characteristic of discursive speech. However, it prohibits the insertion of an auxiliary compound verb between the two clauses, a characteristic of non-discursive speech. A threat is an ultimatum imposed by one person on another, and does not develop from the mutual cooperation of the participants in conversation. To inspire fear and acquiescence, someone who threatens another gives his opponent—not really an addressee—no quarter. The order of events in a threat must appear inflexible, irresistible. Introducing an ACV marking taxis into the structure would offer an opening to the one being menaced, inviting a different outcome of events. These facets of a threat are enough to guarantee a departure from the norms of discursive speech, and enough to exclude ACVs from threats.[2]

As noted in Steever 2005, expressive forms tend to occur in discursive speech but not non-discursive speech. Besides the grammatical categories

of tense and person noted above, non-discursive speech tends to exclude affective lengthening, *ki*-echo forms, address forms, curses, et cetera.

An adept story-teller/author is able to blend elements from both ends of the spectrum to achieve desired rhetorical or structural effects. While "pure" non-discursive speech tends to avoid the use of auxiliary verbs, some narrative combine features of discursive speech, for example, quotations, with non-discursive speech. For example, further analysis of the disposition of linguistic expressions in discursive and non-discursive speech is found in Herring 1991, which studies the distribution of predicate types, auxiliaries, and other forms in four oral narrative genres: real-life accounts (REA), folktales (FT), performed epics (PE), and elicited epics (EE). She concludes, for example, that the dominant tense-forms in these four are as follows: REA, past; FT, present; PE, past; and EE, present. Another typical finding is that use of the auxiliary verb *viṭa* 'depart' is far less frequent in PE than in the other three genres, presumably since the narrative in PE has been repeated over time which results in a smoothing out of all the bumps and missteps in the narrative flow, thereby eliminating those situations that would prompt the use of this auxiliary. One problem in the analysis is that Herring does not contrast the use of the various linguistic forms in these narrative genres with their use in discursive speech, for example, conversation, giving rise to a skewed view of verbal categories.
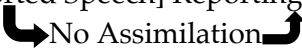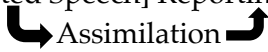
2. Direct versus Indirect Discourse

A similar asymmetry in the inventory of grammatical forms appears in the distinction between direct and indirect discourse. When reporting the speech of another, many languages have resort to two kinds of constructions: direct versus indirect discourse, which anchor the ends of another continuum that allows for such mixed structures as semi-indirect discourse.

In both direct and indirect discourse, the reported speech is sub-ordinated to the reporting speech; in Tamil, the reported speech typically precedes the reporting speech. In indirect discourse, the deictic center of the reported speech is assimilated to that of the reporting speech. This, in effect, converts the discursive speech of the reported speech into non-discursive speech. One side-effect is to eliminate reference to the principal

of the reported speech. Much of this assimilation process alters the inventory of forms that may appear in the reported speech, usually by restricting what forms may occur in it. For example, finite verb forms are replaced by such nonfinite forms such as the infinitive or a verbal noun. See Table 1 for a non-exhaustive list of differences between the two.

Table 1. Direct and Indirect Discourse in Tamil

Direct Discourse	Indirect Discourse
[[Reported Speech] Reporting Speech]	[[Reported Speech] Reporting Speech]
↳No Assimilation↰	↳Assimilation↰
1. Two Deictic Centers	1.˙ One Deictic Center
2. Finite Embedded Verbs	2.˙ Nonfinite Embedded Verbs
3. Quotative Complementizer *enru*	3.˙ Infinitival Complementizer
	Adnominal Form + *paṭi* 'as'
	Verbal Noun + *āka* 'become'
4. Imperative/Optative Forms	4.˙ Infinitival Forms
5. Affective Lengthening and Lexis	5.˙ No Affective Lengthening or Lexis
6. Non-Shifted Deixis/Pronouns	6.˙ Shifted Deixis/Pronouns
7. Vocatives/Exclamations	7.˙ No Vocatives/Exclamations
8. Interrogative Forms	8.˙ No Interrogative Forms
9. Attitudinal Auxiliary Verbs	9.˙ No Attitudinal Auxiliary Verbs

Within this context, one way of creating non-discursive speech is to minimize or eliminate altogether reference to the speech-event and its participants, viz. the speaker (c.p. principal, author) and the hearer, in the reported speech. Doing so changes the interpretation of forms so that tense, E^s/E^n, is revalorized as taxis, E^nE^n, or eliminated altogether. Such changes, I should caution, are rarely reflected in the morphology that encodes grammatical categories. Few languages have distinct, parallel paradigms for forms in discursive and in non-discursive speech (but see the Toda example below for morphological differences in declarative and interrogative paradigms). Speakers generally understand the difference by referring the forms to their larger context, and automatically adjust their interpretations of the categories.

While Dravidian languages lack sequence-of-tense phenomena, a very common feature of "semi-indirect discourse" in Dravidian is to replace a subject pronoun in the reported speech with a third-person reflexive pronoun, if it is co-referential with a subject NP in the reporting speech (even so, a finite verb retains its original first- or second-person personal ending). This is covered in row 6 of Table 1. Old Tamil has similar examples that alter second- (3a) or third-person pronouns (3b), as well. Both, it will be observed, may additionally involve instances of raising to object position, but this does not motivate or explain the shift in person.

(3)a   *nummai* 'you-ACC' → *emmai* 'we-ACC' (not reflexive)
        [[*emmai.p purappēm*]   *eṉpār=um*   *palar=āl*] (kali 94:24–25)
        we-ACC protect-NPST-1P say-NPST-VN-3P=and many-ASR
        'There are many who say they will protect us (/*themselves).'

   b   *avaṉ* 'he-NOM → *niṉṉai* 'you-ACC' (raising to object position)
        [*niṉṉ-ai* [*iṉṉāṉ*]   *eṉru*   *uraittal*] … (*pari.* 1:31–32)
        you-ACC such-3MS say-CF say-VN
        'Saying/declaring you to be of this/such nature …'

Shifting attention to Modern Tamil, we see in the following brace of examples (from the 2010 novel *Mātorupākaṉ* by Perumal Murugan) the effects of assimilation as we move from direct to indirect discourse. Example (4a) is close to pure direct discourse, except for the fact that the complementizer *eṉpatu*, a nominalized verb, has replaced the expected, unmarked *eṉru*, a conjunctive form. This nominalization appears to package the reported speech as given information in the context. This "objectification" of the reported speech is a first step toward assimilation of the reported speech to the reporting speech. In (4b), the complementizer *eṉru* 'saying', subordinating an imperative form, has been replaced by the infinitive, a further step toward assimilation. Example (4c) offers yet a further example of this assimilation (see row 3 in Table 1): an imperative and *eṉru* have been replaced by a combination of adnominal verb form and the manner adverb/noun *paṭi* 'step.

(4)a   *Mātorupākan*, 146
       [[*kūṭṭattiṟkuḷ   pōkumpōtu   rompavum eccarikkai.y-āka irukka*
        crowd-within go-FUT-ADN much   care-ADV   be-INF

       vēṇṭum] eṉpat-ai   maṭṭum tirumpa.t tirumpa.c coṉṉār].
       must-FV   say-VN-ACC only   again   again   tell-PST-3H
       'He kept repeating how one must be careful when entering the
       crowd.'

   b   *Mātorupākan*, 146
       [[*kazuttu.c caraṭṭai.y=um   tālikkoṭi.y-ai=um   pattirama-āka.p*
         neck-OBL chain-ACC=and tali.pendant-ACC=and careful-ADV

       pārttu.kkoḷḷa.c]   coṉṉār].
       watch-INF   tell-PST-3H
       'He told (them) to be mindful of the chains and tali pendants
       around their necks.'

   c   *Mātorupākan*, 147
       [[*iruvar=um taṉittaṉai.y-āka.p pirintu   viṭṭāl=um   cantaikki*
        two-H=and separate-ADV   separate-A-CF leave-CND=and market-DAT

       vantu   cērntu viṭum   paṭi]   coṉṉār]
       come-CF join-CF leave-FUT-ADN manner tell-PST-3H
       'He told them to return to the market if the two of them got
       separated from each other [in the crowd].'

Affective Lengthening (row 1, Table 1) occurs in (unassimilated) direct
discourse (5b) but not indirect discourse (5c):

(5)a   *perīiya maṉuṣaṉ   varuvāṉ*. (*periya* 'big' > *perīiya* 'reeeeally big')
       big-EXG man-NOM come-FUT-3MS
       'A reeeeally big man will come.'

   b   [[*perīiya maṉuṣaṉ   varuvāṉ]   eṉṟu coṉṉāṉ*.
        big-EXG man-NOM come-FUT-3MS say-CF tell-PST-3MS
       'He said, "A reeeeally big man will come".'

   c   **perīiya maṉuṣaṉ   varuvatu   āka.c   coṉṉāṉ*.
        big-EXG man-NOM come-FUT-VN become-INF tell-PST-3MS
       'He said that/how a reeeeally big man will come.'

Participants at the workshop discussion of an earlier draft of this paper noted that *perīiiya* 'reeeally big' is often used ironically, with a formal augmentative process to signify a diminutive, for example, 'a big man (in his own mind)', that is, 'a small man'. What matters here is that the Affective Lengthening is a non-neutral form of evaluative speech, conveying the speaker's emotional evaluation, and is absent from indirect speech.

Attitudinal auxiliary verbs (row 9, Table 1) occur in direct discourse (6b) but not that indirect discourse (6c). Here, there is speaker variation in the acceptability of these constructions: conservative speakers reject the indirect discourse forms while non-conservative speakers may find some marginally acceptable.[3]

(6)a   *colli   oẕintāṉ*
       tell-CF purge-PST-3MS
       'He said it (I am relieved).'

  b   [[*colli   oẕintāṉ*]   *eṉru   coṉṉāḷ.*
       tell-CF purge-PST-3MS say-CF tell-PST-3FS
       'She said, "He said it (and I [=she] am relieved)".'

  c   **colli   oẕintatu   āka.c   coṉṉāḷ.*
       tell-CF purge-PST-VN become-INF tell-PST-3FS
       ?'She said how he said it.'

Other differences in the inventory of forms between indirect and direct discourse are illustrated and discussed in Steever (2005:chapter 5).

3. Grammatical Forms and Categories in Tamil

The interpretation of linguistic expressions may be clarified by additional contextual distinctions; by the study of different grammatical categories; and by comparison with other languages of the Dravidian family. The opposition of discursive versus non-discursive speech is not the only contextual feature available to speakers and their interlocutors to assist in interpretation, of course. In this section, I look briefly at the grammar questions and answers, comparing the exploitation of a grammatical form—the personal ending—in two different languages, Old Tamil and Toda.

Now for a plunge into the category of person in Old Tamil. As other Dravidian languages, Old Tamil distinguishes between finite and nonfinite predicates. Finite predicates serve as a deictic anchor for the sentence; typically, finite verbs are marked by two shifters. The first is tense (E^s/E^n), which in a separate paradigm is replaced by negative polarity. The second are personal endings that mark the person (P^s/E^n), number (quantifier of P^n), and gender (qualifier of P^n) of the clausal subject. In effect, Tamil personal endings mark agreement between a subject and its predicate. First- and second-person personal endings necessarily refer to the speech event and are characteristic of discursive speech. These personal endings (PE) exhibit an exuberant allomorphy in Old Tamil. Lehmann (1994:86ff) lists the following ones in Table 2.

Table 2: Personal Endings in Old Tamil

first singular: *-eṉ, -ēṉ, -al, -aṉ*   first plural: *-am, -ām, -em, -ēm*
second singular: *-ai, -āy, -ōy*   second plural: *-ir, -īr*
third singular masculine: *-aṉ, āṉ, -ōṉ*   third human: *-ar, -ār, -ōr*
third singular feminine: *-aḷ, -āḷ, -ōḷ*   third plural neuter: *-a*
third singular neuter: *-tu, -ttu, -atu*

Setting the neuter forms aside, a provisional analysis sorts the endings in each cell into short and long person endings (PEs) depending on whether the vowel in the PE is long or short, for example, *-eṉ* versus *-ēṉ* for the first-person singular. PEs with the vowel *o*, for example, *-oy*, are characteristic of verbal nouns.[4]

Old Tamil exploited the distinction between short and long PEs as follows: the negative conjugation always had PEs with long vowels while in the two other finite paradigms, past and nonpast, short PEs freely alternated with long PEs. The one major exception to this latter statement are the "extended" past tense forms which have the "increment" *-aṉ-* between the past tense marker and the PE, e.g. *va-nt-aṉ-aṉ* 'he came/has come' [come-PST-INCR-3MS]: these forms always had short PEs. While lasting as far as the *Kampa Ramayana*, the extended form ultimately dies out in continental Tamil but remains in Sri Lankan Tamil, where its historically

short PEs are subsequently lengthened by analogy into long PEs to conform with the other finite paradigms.

It appears that pre-Tamil exploited the different personal endings as follows: short PEs in positive polarity and long PEs in negative polarity. The long vowels began to spread into all the positive paradigms except for the "extended" past forms. These were the remnants of an archaic form of a Proto-Dravidian present perfect tense-form and had already undergone contraction (Steever 1993) in Tamil so that the underlying ACV was no longer transparent. With this opacity, and the inability to segment the forms into discrete tense markers and personal endings (speakers likely vascillated whether to associate *-aṉ-* with the preceding tense marker or the following PE), these forms resisted the spread of long PEs for a long time. Ultimately, the extended past-tense forms were eliminated in continental Tamil and restructured in Sri Lankan Tamil, e.g. *va-nt-aṉ-āṉ* 'I have come.'

Over time, continental Tamil simplifies this allomorphy so that the long PEs, already entrenched in the negative conjugation, come to dominate all cells of the finite paradigm, except for the third-person neuter in the affirmative, where short PEs survive. In a case of simplification, Modern Standard Tamil retains only one allomorph for each cell: *-ēṉ*, *-āy*, *-āṉ*, *-āḷ*, *-atu*, *-ōm*, *-īṅkaḷ* (<-*īr* + -*kaḷ*), *-āṅkaḷ* (<-*ār* + -*kaḷ*), *-aṉa*. Some dialects, for example, in Koṅkunāṭu, retain both long and short allomorphs; authors writing in this dialect may exploit short PEs to impart "local color" to the dialogues in their stories.

To further complicate the situation, Old Tamil also had cumulative endings (Lehmann 1994:91ff.), portmanteaus that combine nonpast tense and personal endings, in Table 3.

Table 3: Cumulative Personal Endings in Old Tamil Incorporating Nonpast Tense

first singular: *-ku* / *-kku*	first plural: *-tum* / *-kum* / *-kam*
second singular: *-ti* / *-tti*	second plural: *-tir*
third neuter: *-um*	third human: *-pa* / *-mār*

All cumulative suffixes are lost in later Tamil, except the third neuter *-um* of the future, for example, *var-um* 'it will come'. I see in the loss of these forms the reassertion of the transparent agglutinating morphology of Tamil which tends to marginalize overly fusional morphology.

To throw the Tamil developments into greater relief, consider the sister language Toda. Historical processes in Toda have revalorized the allomorphic distinction of long versus short PEs differently. The negative paradigm (Emeneau 1984:135–36) consists of S[1] of the verb and a set of PEs, one for each cell of the paradigm. These PEs were originally long but their vowels have been shortened in accordance with a phonological rule that shortened all long vowels in non-initial syllables. The Toda negative paradigm is thus directly cognate with the Old Tamil negative paradigm in every facet of its structure.

Turning to positive polarity, we see that Toda now has parallel, separate finite paradigms, past and nonpast (Emeneau's present-future), depending as they occur in declarative (I) or interrogative sentences (II), as illustrated in Table 4 (Emeneau 1984). Column I shows two variants of the finite verb, the first without the decla-rative clitic *=i* ($<$*$=\bar{e}$ 'even, and'), the second with it. The forms in Column II are conditioned by the presence of an interrogative element, often the postclitic *=ā* on the verb itself or a question word elsewhere in the clause. Additional contexts for the forms in Column II are (i) when followed by a quotative verb (but without the declarative clitic *=i*) and (ii) as the first member of a pair of verbs in alternative questions.

Table 4: Personal Endings in Toda (*pīx-* 'go')

	Non-Past		Past	
	I	II	I	II
1S	*pīpen/pīpin=i*	*pīn*	*pīšpen/pīšpin=i*	*pīšn*
1Pex	*pīpem/pīpim=i*	*pīm*	*pīšpem/pīšpimi=i*	*pīšm*
1Pin	*pīpum/pīpum=i*	*pīm*	*pīšpum/pīšpum=i*	*pīšm*
2S	*pīpy/pīp=i*	*pīty*	*pīšpy/pīšp=i*	*pīč*
2P	*pītš/pītš=i*	*pītš*	*pīš/pīš=i*	*pīš*
3	*pīt/pīt=i*	*pīu*	*pīč/pīč=i*	*pīšk*

The forms in Column I descend from pre-Toda forms with long PEs while those in Column II had PEs with short PEs. At one point in pre-Toda the use of short PEs was conditioned by the presence of an interrogative element while long PEs occurred in all other contexts, for example, declarative sentences. What were historically long PEs in pre-Tamil and Toda underwent a phonological development that shortens long non-initial vowels in Toda (Column I), while what were originally short PEs were lost entirely (Column II) by yet another phonological development that eliminated non-initial short vowels altogether; compare Tamil *avaṉ* 'that man', 'he' with its Toda cognate *avn*. (Note, incidentally, that that loss of historically short vowels neutralizes the distinction between the inclusive and exclusive forms of the first-person plural.) We do not know whether Old Tamil retains any evidence of this kind of distribution of short versus long PEs with respect to questions and statements. If it does not, this is an innovation within Toda and not part of common South Dravidian heritage. The point is this (re-)distribution of personal endings is guided by a functional linguistic difference between questions and declarations.

The histories of the two languages have handled an allomorphic difference between two sets of personal endings in two different ways. In the Tamil case, the set of PEs spread from the negative conjugation to embrace all finite paradigms, regardless of polarity. In those paradigms of Toda that mark positive polarity, the allomorphs were put to use so that the reflexes of one set (short PEs) redundantly signaled a question while the other set signaled a statement (long PEs). This distinction might loosely be brought under the opposition of discursive versus non-discursive speech, on the assumption that questions are more characteristic of discursive speech while statements appear in both discursive and non-discursive speech. Questions in non-discursive speech, where the story does *not* develop through the mutual cooperation of a speaker and hearer, seem often to be rhetorical questions.

One point to be drawn from this is that Old Tamil was not itself a fixed language, but was itself the result of prior historical changes as well as intimations of changes yet to come. Our understanding of those forms requires us to think like historical linguists and consider evidence from other stages of the language or parallel developments in sister languages. Further, the change in PEs in later stages of Tamil appear to have had an impact outside the distribution of subject-predicate agreement markers. In Old Tamil, presence of a long PE was a necessary (but not sufficient)

condition for the negative conjugation; as later stages of Tamil promoted the use of long PEs throughout the verbal paradigm, a long PE was no longer associated with negation because it also occurred in positive forms. This may have spurred the gradual retrenchment and loss of the negative conjugation now represented in the modern language only by such relics as *kāṇōm* 'we do not see' and *aṟiyēṉ* 'I do not know'. The finite negative conjugation, for example, *vā-rēṉ* 'I did/do/will not come', was ultimately replaced by such compound verb constructions as *vara.v illai* '(one) did/does not come' and *vara māṭṭāṉ* 'he will not come'.

The distribution of forms other than verbs are conditioned by other major grammatical distinctions such as polarity, modality, and tense. Negative-polarity items are well-known in the literature. In one sense, the verb *al-* 'not become' is a negative polarity item: it is the negative stem form of *āka* 'become'. Similar to this are modal-polarity items which are discussed in Steever 2005:86–87. For example, the indefinite quantifier *yār=āvatu* 'someone' appears in modal contexts, as defined there, while the indefinite quantifier *yār=ō* 'someone' appears in nonmodal (i.e., indicative) contexts. *Ki*-echo words in Tamil may occur in negative, interrogative, or modal contexts, but not in the affirmative indicative.

Tense: Past versus Nonpast

The verbal category of tense (E^s/E^n) is a shifter that is characteristic of discursive speech and is well represented throughout Dravidian verbal morphology.

The distribution of tense-forms among the daughter languages of the Dravidian family permits the reconstruction of only three finite paradigms to Proto-Dravidian (Krishnamurti 2003): past affirmative, nonpast affirmative and, corresponding to both, a single negative paradigm; their respective markers are past: *-(t)t-* ~ *-i-*; nonpast: *-(p)p-* ~ *-(k)k-*; negative *-ϕ-*. Old Tamil reflexes of *-(k)k-* occur in forms such as *aṟiku* 'I do/will know', which contains the cumulative suffix *-ku* that marks both nonpast tense and first-person singular agreement marker (see Table 3). Old Tamil also has reflexes of nonpast *-(p)p-*, with the allomorphs *-p-*, *-pp-* and *-v-*. The latter allomorph appears in *aṟi-v-eṉ* 'I do/will know' [know-NPST-1S]. In the Old Tamil corpus, this tense-marker is sometimes preceded by what is called a euphonic increment *-ku-*, e.g. *aṟi-ku-v-eṉ* 'I do/will know', which appears to homophonous with the cumulative suffix for nonpast first-

person singular. This form might thus be interpreted as a doubly marked nonpast tense form in which allomorphs of *-(p)p-* are added to a stem that already incorporates a reflex of the other Proto-Dravidian nonpast marker *-(k)k-*. This doubling serves to reinforce nonpast meaning in a way parallel to the development of the "double" plural PEs *īṅkaḷ* <-*īr* + -*kaḷ*, and -*āṅkaḷ* <-*ār* + -*kaḷ* that arose in the history of Tamil. While some evidence exists to motivate a morpheme boundary between the "increment" and tense marker, relevant data points are sparse. It is an open question whether this analysis can be applied to other cells of the verbal paradigm, for example, first-person plural or second-person plural. Did this change occur in all cells of the paradigm or did it start in the first-person singular and spread from there?

In any event, Old Tamil's fundamental agglutinating morphology subsequently reasserted itself by casting off its cumulative suffixes as overly fusional and opaque. It is likely that unsegmentable and—in the context of an agglutinative language—uninterpretable portmanteaus such as *-ku* were either reinterpreted as part of the verb base or simply discarded. While the word-formation rules for Old Tamil admitted three slots from finite verbs, viz., verb base, tense/polarity, and personal ending, the cumulative suffix allomorphs straddled the two latter slots, introducing a measure of instability in the one-to-one correspondence between morpheme and morph in the word-formation rules for finite verbs in an agglutinating language. As these cumulative suffixes were shed from these Old Tamil nonpast forms, new markers were added to the verb base. Ultimately, the forms with the euphonic increments were eliminated from Tamil as reflexes of *-(p)p-* spread throughout the lexicon.

Subsequent developments in Kota and Palu Kurumba show the increment has fused with the tense marker, ousting the morpheme boundary; for example, Kota *va-kv-ēm* [come-FUT-1PL.EX] 'we will come', Palu Kurumba *kuḍi-kuv-ēnu ~ kuḍi-kuv-e* [drink-FUT-1S] 'I will drink'. This restructuring brings the contracted form into conformity with the word-formation rules for finite verbs, which permit one tense marker per finite verb. Erosion of this morpheme boundary likely began in the Old Tamil period. In Modern Tamil reflexes of *-(p)p-* have ousted reflexes of *-(k)k-* in most cells of the nonpast (now future) paradigm; in closely related Irula, however, only reflexes of *-(k)k-* are found.

4. Tense in Old Tamil

As has become obvious by now, our understanding of the broad contexts in which forms of Tamil appear influences how we interpret those forms. In her student's grammar and her elegant edition of *Ākanāṉūṟu*, Eva Wilden (2018a, 2018b) labels the traditional distinction between past and nonpast in Old Tamil as "perfective" versus "imperfective," respectively, citing in support of this claim Josef Deigner's (1998) attempt to distinguish between the conjunctive form and the infinitive in terms of aspect. Replacement of the traditional category of tense by this novel proposal entails some difficulties, which, I believe, may be resolved by appeal to our understanding of basic categories and how they interact with the broader contexts in which they occur.[5]

Deigner (1998) sought to characterize the semantic distinction between the infinitive and conjunctive verb form in Modern Tamil. One major shortcoming of Deigner's analysis, pertinent to the topic under discussion, was to restrict his primary corpus to a textbook of Tamil short writings, and not supplement that data with conversational inter-actions among speakers. (See Steever 2000 for a more complete review of the work and its limitations). Deigner was thus not in a position to interrogate the authors of these stories about their intentions, meanings, et cetera. This methodological limitation had the effect of "flattening" out discursive speech *into* non-discursive speech, which painted him into a corner from which he could not reconstruct the meaning of, say, tense in discursive speech from what I have been calling taxis in non-discursive speech. Another methodological issue is that Deigner chose to model his treatment of Tamil on Latin, rather than using general linguistic tools of linguistic analysis, models of morphological categories, or definitions of the category of aspect.

These important issues aside, however, the central problem with Deigner's conclusions, however, is that they are, arguably, wrong: the opposition between the infinitive and conjunctive form is not one of aspect, but of *mood*. The infinitive is the least marked modal form of Tamil while the conjunctive is the least marked non-modal, or indicative, form where mood is the qualifier that characterizes the narrated event (E^n) as real (indicative) or not (modal). This analysis dates to at least Steever (1981) and is summarized in Steever (2005), where aspect and mood are distinguished from each other as separate verbal categories, and both are distinct

from the aspectual class of the verb base. Aspect is the qualifier of E^n and assumes a division of a verbal activity into an onset, body, and coda, which are realized over time; a primary aspectual distinction is between perfective activities (those with a change-of-state coda) and imperfective activities (those without). Thus, the first—and most damning—problem with Wilden's citation is that Deigner's analysis is wrong.

The second problem with Wilden's recruiting Deigner's work is anachronism: Deigner treats Modern Tamil, Wilden Old Tamil.

A third problem is that Deigner's analysis pertains to the contrast between two nonfinite forms, the infinitive and the conjunctive while Wilden seeks to describe a contrast between two entire finite paradigms.

A fourth issue arises when we consider this analysis from the perspective of comparative Dravidian linguistics. Besides evidence internal to Modern Tamil, comparison of Tamil with such sister languages as Alu Kurumba, Kannada, Kota, Telugu, Toda, et cetera demonstrate that the relevant contrast is one of past versus non-past *tense*. Linguists over many decades have analyzed these Tamil forms and their cognates in other Dravidian languages as signaling tense, rather than aspect.[6]

Fifth, from an antiquarian perspective, the Tamil grammatical tradition treats the central term *kālam* as referring to time (ontologically) and to tense (grammatically), not as anything we recognize today as aspect. This grammatical literature has evolved over time and supplemented its basic theory of *kālam* with such concepts as *kālamayyakam* 'interchange of tense' and *kālavaẕuvamaiti* 'sanctioned deviations in the use of tense' to analyze apparent departures from the fundamental meaning of tense / time reference. From a general linguistic perspective, tense and aspect exhibit different traits that are reflected in different grammatical behavior (see Forsyth 1970; Friedrich 1974; Comrie 1986).

Deigner's claims aside, what is lacking in Wilden's proposal that the past-nonpast distinction is actually one of aspect, not tense, is any explicit grammatical argumentation. So, it would be helpful for Wilden's argument to explicate their thoughts about aspect in Old Tamil and, perhaps with the help of linguists, see whether their intuitions about their textual corpus can be translated into explicit, and comparatively generalizable, linguistic arguments. An intuition about the meaning and use of a form may serve as a heuristic to help one grapple with interpreting a text, but from a linguistic perspective such an intuition remains just a hunch until

valid grammatical arguments are offered to confirm, refute, or otherwise modify the linguistic content of that intuition/hypothesis.

At the bare minimum, we need arguments based on minimal pairs and co-occurrence restrictions, particularly with temporal expressions. As an example of the second kind of argument, in Old Tamil *neruṉal āṭiṉai puṉalē* [yesterday play-PST-2S river=EMP] 'yesterday you played/were playing in the river', the past tense form *āṭiṉai* 'you played' is shown to co-occur with the past time expression *neruṉal* 'yesterday' and so is consistent with past time reference. Further, the interpretation of the aspectual type of the verb base in this example appears to be neutral, as between being viewed as partial and incomplete ('be playing', imperfective) or as a totality and completed ('played a game', perfective). Such arguments must control for the fact that the Tamil verb base is inherently durative (Paramasivam 1979:50–51; Steever 2005:56–57), so that we can progressively focus both on the contribution of the grammatical morphemes that follow the base and on whether they represent a category of aspect or tense.

Coming back to the main focus of this paper, these arguments must also control for the kind of utterance, discursive versus non-discursive speech in which various examples are embedded, so that the arguments cover the full range of categories. On the view that the Old Tamil poetic corpus is one in which bards perform from a repertoire for an audience (a view that was voiced during another presentation during the Chicago Tamil Forum), and not one that spontaneously evolves from the interaction of a principal and addressee, we need to be watchful for the "flattening" out of categories that occurs in non-discursive speech lest we rule out tense as a viable category.

Such arguments, when made explicit, will also have to offer compelling counterarguments to the existing linguistic literature which contains arguments that the appropriate grammatical distinction is one of tense. They will also need to contend with existing arguments in that literature that militate against the use of aspect as the relevant category for interpreting tense-forms (e.g., Steever 1993:182–88, 2005:chapter 4).

Apart from this synchronic challenge before them, proponents of the aspectual hypothesis must then be prepared to make at least two historical linguistic arguments. First, how did Old Tamil, which descends from a tense-prominent language, viz. Proto-Dravidian (Krishnamurti 2003: 274ff.), develop into an aspect-prominent language? Second, how (and when) did aspect in Old Tamil became a tense-prominent language (again)

in Modern Tamil? Persuasive grammatical argumentation is needed to answer both questions.

The linguistic literature on the analysis of tense (and aspect) is vast, ranging from Reichenbach's treatment of tense and time reference, to European structural linguistics, to branching futures logical models. This literature may—or may not—provide examples of relevant argumentation for the proponents of the aspectual hypothesis. A good place to start would be a structural analysis of grammatical categories, grounded in the distinction between discursive and non-discursive speech, and supported by a thorough literature review. Until explicit arguments emerge, the aspectual hypothesis is probably best regarded as a promissory note, but one facing an uphill battle. Until those arguments emerge, interpretations of Tamil texts, literary or otherwise, based on this aspectual proposal will remain dubious.

4. Summary

This paper treats some issues in the interpretation of basic forms of Tamil in terms of the distinction between discursive and non-discursive speech. Appeal to this distinction may clarify the definition and interpretation of grammatical categories that have eluded, and continue to do so, precise linguistic analysis. Though Tamil is perhaps the best-studied of all the Dravidian languages and we have a broad understanding of verbal categories utilized in the modern language (see Steever 2005), much remains to be done in both the synchronic and historical descriptions of the language.

Notes

1 The translations below are mine and appear in Steever 2005.

2 Participants in the workshop noted that these formulaic threats exhibit great variation by dialect. I suggested they might provide enough material for a good MA thesis.

3 The original translations have been replaced as inapposite, underscoring that there is sometimes no one-to-one correspondence between Tamil and English forms.

4 Examples of Sri Lankan Tamil present perfect, for example, *vantaṉāṉ* 'I have come', were provided by discussants.

5 In discussion, Sascha Ebeling noted that Wilden's citation of Deigner's work was likely an afterthought. He explained further that, during talks at a summer course they both taught on Classical Tamil, he and Wilden arrived at an understanding of the distinction as one of imperfective versus perfective aspect in relation specifically to the texts that they were analyzing (rather than as a calque from Deigner's conclusions). Nevertheless, it is important to examine some difficulties with Deigner's work, as well as the imputation of an imper-fective–perfective distinction to nonpast and past tense forms.

6 Interestingly a number of Dravidian linguists who speak a Slavic language as their mother tongue—for example, Andronov, Glazunov (Russian); Zvelevil (Czech)—and therefore speak languages in which aspect is central to verb morphology, have not proposed aspect as the fundamental distinction in Tamil.

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