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On the two lists of ‘four [types of] words’ (*nār-col*) in the śāstric descriptions of Tamil*

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The research for this article, which falls under the general category “History of Linguistics”, was started as an examination, in context, of the use of the Tamil technical term *tiricol*, lit. “mutant word”, which is the designation of the second among four categories of “word(s)” (*col*) inside one of the two quadripartite classificatory systems, found in the *Tolkāppiyam*, an ancient Tamil śāstric text, probably dating back to the first half of the first millenium AD. The first term in that quadripartition is *iyar-col* “natural word”, whereas the third and the fourth are *ticaic-col* “regional word(s)” and *vaṭa-col* “northern word(s)”. The *Tolkāppiyam* devotes to that classification the first seven sūtras in the ninth chapter (*Eccaviyal* “Chapter on the remainder”) of its second book, the *Col-I-Atikāram*, “*Adhikāra* on words”.¹ The first of these sūtra-s (TC397c), after enumerating the four categories, states that these are all the types of words which can be found, accumulated in a “(Poetical) Composition” (*ceyyu!*), and it is followed by two other sūtras which state that:

- (1) “Among them, the natural words (*iyar-col*) are those which resound (*icaikkum*) without deviating (*vaḷāmai*) from their value (*tam poru!*) residing (*civaṇi*) within the ordinary usage (*vaḷakku*) [found] in the land (*nilattu*) of Straight² Tamil (*centami!*).” (TC398c)³
- (2) “[It being the case] EITHER that distinct words (*vēru col*) denote/point to (*kuṛitta*) one value (*oru poru!*), OR that one word (*oru col*) points to (*kuṛitta*) distinct values (*vēru poru!*), they say (*eṇpa*) that the mutant words⁴ (*tiricol*) have two subdivisions (*irupāru*).” (TC399c)⁵

These two are then followed by the sūtra TC400c,⁶ which deals with *ticaic col* “regional words” and for which, because of the word *cērnta*, two interpretations⁷ are possible namely

- (3a) “It is in the twelve lands (*paṇṇiru nilam*) which are part of (*cērnta*) Straight Tamil (*centami!*) that the ‘regional words’ (*ticaic col*) have their denotative power (*taṅkuṛippina*)”.

* I am grateful to my wife Eva Wilden and to my friend Dominic Goodall for reading a preliminary version of this paper and for making useful suggestions. I also wish to express my thanks to my friend Alexander Dubiansky for organizing the Tamil panel of the ICOSAL 2012 Moscow conference where this paper was originally read, under a different title. As often happens, I was not able to present here the totality of the facts which I had originally intended to cover.

¹ For a complete (French) translation of the *Collatikāram*, along with a translation of one of its commentaries, and a complete terminological glossary, see Chevillard[1996 & 2008a] (reviewed by Steever [1999 & 2009]).

² For a discussion of *centami!* in early Tamil literature, see Wilden[2009], who suggests “refined Tamil” as a translation.

³ *Avaṛu!* // *iyarcol rāmē* // *centami!* *nilattu vaḷakkoṭu civaṇit* // *tamporu!* *vaḷāmai yicaiccuñ collē*. The seven sūtra-s (TC397c to TC403c), along with their commentary are translated in Chevillard[1996: 470-481].

⁴ The expression *tiri-col* can be analysed as a combination of *col* “word” and *tiri*, which is the (verbal) root of *tiritai* “to mutate, to be metamorphosed, to change”. The sūtra translated in (2) is probably not to be viewed as a definition sūtra of *tiri-col* (because the designation itself defines what a *tiri-col* is), but rather like a classificatory sūtra.

⁵ *Oruporu!* *kuṛitta vērucol lākiyūm* // *vēruporu!* *kuṛitta vorucol lākiyū* // *mirupār reṇpa tiricol kiḷavi*.

⁶ *Centami!* *cērnta paṇṇiru nilattiṇun* // *taṅkuṛip piṇavē ticaiccol kiḷavi*. (TC400c)

⁷ See Ezhuthachan’s observation: “The question is whether Tolkāppiyar’s statement ‘*Sentami!* *cērnta paṇṇiru nilattum*’ means the 12 lands lying inside the Tamil country or lands adjacent to it; *cērnta* can be construed either way. The first view seems to be correct. [...] Tolkāppiyar might have been thinking of regional dialects inside the Tamil land which included Kerala in his times.” (K. N. Ezhuthachan[1975], p. 71, fn. 12c).

(3b) “It is in the twelve lands (*paṅṅiru nilam*) adjacent to (*cērnta*) [the country of] Straight Tamil (*centamil*) that the ‘regional words’ (*ticaic col*) have their denotative power (*taṅkuṛippina*)”.

Having already argued elsewhere⁸ that both interpretations have been used, at different periods, in the course of history, I do not discuss it further and shall now give, for the sake of completion, the two sūtra-s which deal with the fourth category, namely *vaṭa-col* “Northern word(s)”.⁹ They are:

(4) “A linguistic expression (*kiḷavi*) which is [termed] a ‘northern word’ (*vaṭacol*) is a word (*col*) in which the combining (*puṇarkkum*) [takes place] with/by means of letters (*eḷuttoṭu*) avoiding (*orī*) [specifically] Northern letters (*vaṭaveḷuttu*)”.¹⁰

(5) “Even if corrupted¹¹ ones (*citaintaṇa*) are met with, [the grammarians] do not exclude (*varaiyār*) those which are acceptable (*iyaintaṇa*)”.¹²

Those five characterizing sūtra-s are then followed by a sūtra (TC403c) which states that “when one strings together (*toṭukkuṅ kālai*) those FOUR (types of) WORDS”, a number of phonetic changes can take place, such as replacement of a stop by a nasal, of a nasal by a stop, of a short by a long, of a long by a short, etc., and the commentators explain that this takes place in view of “the pleasure given by a poetical composition” (*ceyyuḷ iṅpam*).

Before however continuing our examination of the category of *tiri-col* and of the three associated categories, we must provide a wider perspective and explain where the topics discussed stand in the overall scheme of the *Tolkāppiyam*. This can be accomplished for instance by examining the broad table of contents (Chart A) of the more than 1600 sūtras contained in the 27 chapters of the *Tolkāppiyam*, which is as follows, and in which the five sūtra-s translated so far, from (1) to (5), are found at the beginning of the chapter TC9 (see middle column):

TE: <i>Adhikāra</i> on letters ¹³ (<i>eḷuttu</i>) [9 chapters]	TC : <i>Adhikāra</i> on words (<i>col</i>) [9 chapters] (463 sūtra-s)	TP: <i>Adhikāra</i> on [poetical] matters (<i>poruḷ</i>) [9 chapters] (656 sūtra-s) ¹⁴
483 sūtra-s, dealing with a number of topics, the most visible one being	TC1 (<i>Kiḷaviyākkam</i> “the formation of utterances” OR ¹⁵ “the preparation of speech”), TC2 (“chapter on case”), TC3	TP1 to TP5 (conventions for love and heroic poetry), TP6 (8 rasa-s)

⁸ I have dealt with *ticaic-col* at length in Chevillard[2008b].

⁹ I have discussed *vaṭacol* in Chevillard[2011b].

¹⁰ *Vaṭacol kiḷavi vaṭaveḷut torī // veḷuttoṭu puṇarnta collā kummē*. (TC401c).

¹¹ As a clarification of what “corrupted” means here, i.e. “adapted”, it can be said that, according to the medieval commentator Cēṅāvaraiyar, the word *mēru* (name of a mythical mountain) is used directly in Tamil whereas the words *daśa* “ten” and *harmya* “terrace in a palace” are used in the adapted forms *taca* and *aramiyam* (See Chevillard[1996: 477-478]).

¹² *Citaintaṇa variṇu miyaintaṇa varaiyār*. (TC402c)

¹³ I use here the word “letter” for convenience. The reader should not base conclusions on this choice. Translating “*Adhikāra* on phonemes” would not be advisable, for obvious reasons.

¹⁴ It should be added that the numbers of sūtra-s in each book (and chapter) given by the various commentators differ slightly, because of differences in the splitting of the *Tolkāppiyam* text. TE, TC and TP have respectively 483, 456 and 610 sūtras, when accompanied by ḷampūraṇar’s commentary, but TC has 463 sūtras when accompanied by Cēṅāvaraiyar’s commentary.

¹⁵ “The formation of utterances” is the translation for the title (*Kiḷavi Ākkam*) of the first chapter of the TC given by K.Zvebil[1978] inside his unfinished translation of TC which appeared inside the JTS. The other possible translation (“the preparation of speech”) which I suggest here for that same title is based on one of the points of view presented inside the commentary by Cēṅāvaraiyar (see Chevillard[1996: 39]) which states that speech is prepared (or purified) by eliminating *vaḷu* “deviation(s), fault(s)”, those being of seven types, because they can concern the *tiṇai* “class”, the *pāl* “gender”, the *marapu* “tradition OR (lexical?) usage”, the *ceppu* “stating”, the *viṇā* “questioning”, the *iṭam* “place (i.e. grammatical person)” or the *kālam* “tense/time” (see Chevillard[1996: 55]).

sandhi (<i>puṅarcci</i>).	("case contamination/mixture"), TC4 ("vocative"), TC5 ("nouns"), TC6 ("verbs"), TC7 ("particles"), TC8 (<i>uric col</i>), TC9 (chapter of the "remainder" [eccam])	theory), TP7 (theory of comparison), TP8 (poetical composition), TP9 (chapter on <i>marapu</i>)
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Chart A: Broad table of content for the three books of the *Tolkāppiyam*

It appears to me that, in view of this table of contents, the *Tolkāppiyam* is best considered as a compromise between two trends: (A) an abstract, purely grammatical, trend, where the primary target is the language, analysed for itself, although a part of the analysis seems to be an unfinished sketch, and although the simplicity of the apparent grid can be deceptive, and (B) a practically-oriented trend, where the primary target is literature and more precisely the training of poets, the composition of literature and its performance. Very broadly speaking, the first book (TE) and the first eight chapters of the second book (TC1 to TC8) illustrate trend A, whereas trend B is illustrated by part of the last chapter of the second book (TC9)¹⁶ and by the third book (TP1 to TP9), although the status of TC9 and TP9 is ambiguous. Such a formulation is of course slightly exaggerated, but it echoes the polarity between the twin avowed targets of the *Tolkāppiyam*, which are *vaḷakku* "(educated) ordinary usage" and *ceyyu!* "(poetical) composition", as announced in its preface (attributed to Paṅampāraṅar). And therefore, for the sake of obtaining an overall perspective, it is necessary to supplement the five *Tolkāppiyam* extracts which I have given so far with other extracts, taken mostly from the first eight chapters of the TC, and that will introduce the reader to another quadripartition of words, which I consider as primary from the point of view of "pure grammar", intending to point out, by means of that expression, that parts of the *Tolkāppiyam* come relatively close (in intention) to the śāstra known as *vyākaraṇa*,¹⁷ although as will become apparent, Tamil "pure grammar" is not Paninian and remains a work in progress.

The primary quadripartition of words in Tamil śāstric grammar

As already explained at the beginning of this article, there exist two quadripartitions of words in the *Tolkāppiyam*. The one which we have not yet examined, but which can be called the primary one, is seen for instance in the table of contents of its second book, the "*Adhikāra* on 'word(s) (*col*)'" (See Chart A), because its constituents appear in the titles of the fifth to eighth chapters, each one of which is devoted to one of them, namely *Peyariyal* "Chapter on noun(s)" (43 sūtras), *Viṇaiyiyal* "Chapter on verb(s)" (51 sūtras), *Iṭaiyiyal* "Chapter on particle(s)" (48 sūtras) and *Uriyiyal* "Chapter on *uriccol*" (100 sūtras),¹⁸ while the first four chapters (TC1 to TC4), totalling 154 sūtras, are devoted to more general topics such as *tiṇai* "(grammatical) class", *pāl* "(grammatical) gender", *iṭam* "(grammatical) person", *vēr̥rumai* "case", *viḷi* "vocative", etc. It must additionally be emphasized that

¹⁶ It is interesting to note that the topic of *tokai* "compounding" (Skt. *samāsa*) is discussed in that section. Were compounds considered as specific to poetry? For more details on the topic of compounding, see Chevillard[2007] and D'Avella (forthcoming).

¹⁷ See for instance what Palsule[1968: 26] writes: "Vyākṛ- which generally means 'to separate, divide, analyse' is first found to have been used in linguistic context in the Taitt. Saṁ. (6.4.7.3) where it is said that the speech was at first unanalysed (*avyākṛtā*), that the gods requested Indra to analyse their speech (*imām no vācam vyākuru*) and that Indra accordingly analysed the speech (*tām Indro madhyato' vakramya vyākarot*)." Interestingly, the preface of the *Tolkāppiyam* seems to state that its author belonged to the school of Indra, when it refers to him as "Having manifested his name as 'Tolkāppiyāṅ, who is fully [competent] in Aintiram'" ([...] *aintiram niṅainta // tolkāp piyaṅṅat taṅpeyar tōṅri // [...]*).

¹⁸ This item is best left untranslated at this stage. There are people who translate *uric col* as "adjective", but that is hardly convincing, and no one should come to a conclusion before reading the whole of the *Uri-yiyal* (chapter TC8 in Chart 1). The translation of that chapter and its commentary by Cēṅāvaraiyar occupy pp. 432-469 inside Chevillard[1996], and I elaborate on it in Chevillard[2008a: 484-487]. See also Chevillard[2010a].

there is a dissymetry inside the quadripartition because, as is clearly stated in the *Tolkāppiyam*, in the fourth and fifth sūtra-s of the *Peyariyal* “Chapter on nouns”:

- (6) Those who are knowledgeable (*aṛinticiṅōr*) say that what are fit to be called (*eṅpa paṭupa*) ‘words’ (*col*) are two (*iraṅṭu*): ‘noun’ (*peyar*) and ‘action/verb’ (*viṅai*)” (TC158c)¹⁹
- (7) “They say (*eṅpa*) that the linguistic item(s) (*kiḷavi*) [called] *iṭaic col* ‘particle’ and the linguistic item(s) [called] *uric col* appear (*tōṅrum*) in their following (*avarṛu vaḷi maruṅkiṅ*)” (TC159c)²⁰

Before elaborating on that difference of status (which is also apparent in the first book of the *Tolkāppiyam*, attested by TE109i), it should be added that the first sūtra inside the *Peyariyal* stated that:

- (8) “All words (*col*) are pointers (*kuṛittaṅa*) towards values/things (*poru!*)” (TC155c)²¹

In that context, if “pointing towards a *poru!*” is understood as a **necessary condition** for [fully] being a word, the reason for the difference in status between the pair {*peyarc col*; *viṅaic col*} treated in (6) on the one hand, and the pair {*iṭaic col*; *uric col*} treated in (7) on the other hand clearly points to a difference in the relationship with *poru!* “meaning, thing meant”. This is confirmed by the statement contained in the first sūtra of the *Iṭaiyiyal* “Chapter on particles”:

- (9) “What are fit to be called (*eṅpa paṭupa*) ‘particle(s)’ (*iṭai*) are not autonomous [but] can be used along with noun(s) (*peyar*) and action(s)/verb(s) (*viṅai*)” (TC249c)²²

It might at this stage be useful to detail the precise content of the *Iṭaiyiyal*, but given that this presentation is intended to be concise, it appears necessary, before returning to *iṭaic col* later, to first provide the reader with a translation of the first sūtra of the *Uriyiyal* “Chapter on *uricol*”, in which this category, whose designation I have left for the time being untranslated, is explained by the author of the *Tolkāppiyam*, in the following way, in two sūtras:

- (10) “When one explains in detail (*virikkuṅ kālai*) the linguistic item(s) [called] *uric col* “appropriate words”, [it can be said **1.** [that] they appear (*tōṅri*) in connection with sound (*icai*), idea (*kuṛippu*) or quality (*paṅpu*), **2.** [that] they are confused (*taṭumāri*) in body (*mey*) with noun (*peyar*) or action/verb (*viṅai*), **3.** [that it may happen that] EITHER (**3a**) is manifested (*tōṅriṅum*) the appropriateness (*urimai*) of one [single] word (*oru col*) for several values/meanings/things (*pala poruṭku*), OR [that] (**3b**) is manifested the appropriateness (*urimai*) of several words (*pala col*) for one [single] value/meaning/thing (*oru poruṭku*), [AND it can be said] **4.** [that] by relating (*cārtti*) the unfrequent ones (*payilātavarrai*) with the frequent ones (*payiṅravai*), [the task is] to explain (*kiḷattal*) distinctly (*vēru*) the values/meanings/things (*poru!*) of whichever word (*ec col āyiṅum*) wherever they are used (*ceṅṅunilai maruṅkiṅ*), as per the tradition of each one (*tattam marapiṅ*)” (TC297c)²³

¹⁹ *Collēṅpa paṭupa peyarē viṅaiyeṅ // rāyiraṅ teṅpa vaṛintici ṅōrē* (TC158c).

²⁰ *Iṭaiccol kiḷaviyu muriccol kiḷaviyu // mavarṛuvali maruṅkiṅ rōṅru meṅpa* (TC159c).

²¹ *Ellāc collum poruḷkuṛit taṅavē* (TC155c).

²² *Iṭaiyeṅpa paṭupa peyaroṭum viṅaiyoṭu // naṭaipeṅ riyalun tamakkiyal pilavē* (TC249c).

²³ *Uriccol kiḷavi virikkuṅ kālai // icaiyiṅuṅ kuṛippuṅ paṅpiṅum tōṅriṅ // peyariṅum viṅaiyiṅu meytaṭu māri // orucol palaporuṭ kurimai tōṅriṅum // palacol loruporuṭ kurimai tōṅriṅum // payilā tavarraiṅ payiṅravai cārttit // tatta marapiṅ ceṅṅunilai maruṅki // neccol lāyiṅum poruḷvēru kiḷattal* (TC297c).

(11) “Explanations (*kiḷattal*) are not needed (*vēṇṭā*) for obvious words (*veḷippaṭu col*), [since] they are [needed only] on (*mēṇa*) those *uric col*, which are not obvious (*veḷippaṭa vārā*)” (TC298c)²⁴

The reason why I had left the item *uric col* “appropriate/proper words” untranslated, may now appear, after the long (and puzzling) statement in (10), more clearly to the reader. There has in fact not been general agreement among the interpreters of this sūtra about what it means precisely. While proposing a translation of *uriccol*, we must also ask ourselves the following question: what was the task at hand, for the author(s) of the *Tolkāppiyam*, and how was he (or how were they) trying to fulfill it? The answer seems to me that he (or they) were trying to describe and normalize (or tame), for the first time, a language, named “Tamiḷ”, which had dialectal variation and which had already been used for poetical composition. Those first describers of Tamil did not however have a virgin mind, because a number of them were probably also masters of a body of Sanskrit technical literature, as is clear through a number of clues, such as the presence of a list of 32 *tantra yukti-s* (*utti*) inside the last chapter of the *Tolkāppiyam*.²⁵ In that context, a suggestion made by one of the commentators of the *Tolkāppiyam*, whose name is Teyvaccilaiyār, seems to make sense. He says the following:

(12) *eḷuttatikārattuḷ itaṇai ‘kuṛaiccoṛkiḷavi’ eṇṇu ṭiṇamaiyāṇ, vaṭanūlācīriyar tātu eṇṇu kuṛiyiṭṭa coṛkaḷē ivaiyeṇṇu koḷlappaṭum, avaiyum kuṛaiccollātalāṇ.* “Since inside his recitation of the *Adhikāra* on Letters [TE482i] he has called this [category] ‘Linguistic item(s) (*kiḷavi*) [which are] incomplete/truncated word(s) (*kuṛaic col*)’, it must be understood that they are those items which are called *tātu* (i.e. *dhātu*) by the masters of the Northern śāstra, because they are incomplete/truncated words” (Teyvaccilaiyār, @TC293t, p.221 in Kōpala Aiyar & Araṇamuṇṇuval, 2003)

Teyvaccilaiyār however continues his explanation by saying that if one asks whether “all those [expressions] which express the meanings of the actions/verbs” (*toḷiṇ poruṇmai uṇarttuvāṇa v-ellām*) are going to be recited in this chapter, or, in other words, whether the *Tolkāppiyam* contains a full *dhātu-pāṭha* with meanings, the answer is “no” because of the instruction given in the following sūtra (see translation in 11), telling us to explain only the meaning of those *uric col*-s which are rare.

What the *Tolkāppiyam* does not contain

Whether or not Teyvaccilaiyār has really understood what the original intention of the author(s) of the *Tolkāppiyam* was, it is indeed a fact that Tamil grammarians never seem to have compiled a *Dhātu Pāṭha*.²⁶ What they did in fact later on the basis of the *Uriyiyal*, taken as a *Nighaṇṭu* fragment,²⁷ was to compile a series of *Kōṣa*-s, the most ancient preserved (which may also have been the first) being the *Tivākaram*. Since I have already discussed this topic elsewhere,²⁸ I shall now discuss other instances of “structural incompleteness” found inside the *Tolkāppiyam*, which are not

²⁴ *Veḷippaṭu collē kiḷattal vēṇṭā // veḷippaṭa vārā vuriccoṇ mēṇa* (TC298c).

²⁵ See, concerning this, Chevillard[2009].

²⁶ The huge difficulties in accomplishing such a task can be measured by anyone who reads Palsule[1961]. Tamil grammarians were probably never numerous enough.

²⁷ Compare the injunctions to explain, at the beginning of the *Uriyiyal*, translated here in (10) and (11), with the initial statement in the *Nirukta*: “A traditional list (of words) has been handed down (to us). **It is to be (here) explained**” (*samāmnāyaḥ samāmnātaḥ ; sa vyākhyātavyaḥ*), *Nirukta* 1.1. (Sarup[1926])

²⁸ I have discussed the transition between the *Uriyiyal* and the *Tivākaram* in Chevillard[2010].

often discussed. One such instance is found in the *Iṭaiyiyal* “Chapter on particles”, in the sūtra which immediately follows the one translated in (9). That sūtra reads:

- (13)** “If one describes them (i.e. the particles), they possess those [various] qualities (*paṇṇina*): **a.** being those which help (*utana*) determining the status of the thing-referred-to (*poruḷ-nilai*) in the in-between (*iṭai*) of a sandhi-situation (*puṇar-iyal nilai*); **b.** being those which come (*varuna*) along with tense/time (*kālamotu*) in the making of a verb/action (*viṇai ceyal maruṅkin*); **c.** being [case]-morphemes (*urupu*), on the occasion of that which has case-value (*vērṛumaip poruḷ vayiṇ*); **d.** being those which have [expletive] syllabic status (*acai-nilai*); **e.** being those which are [expletive] metrical complement (*icai-niṛai*); **f.** being those which, thanks to their respective *kuṛippu* (‘pointing’), produce meaning (*poruḷ-ceykuna*); **g.** being those which, in the absence of *oppu* (‘resembling’), produce a [comparison] meaning” (TC250c).²⁹

In this list of seven types of *iṭaic col* “particles”, only three types, namely d., e. and f., are actually relevant with respect to the actual content of the *Iṭaiyiyal* “Chapter on particles”, which is an enumeration of the meanings of roughly 45 distinct particles, the two most important, based on the number of sūtra-s which deal with them, being the coordinative clitic *-um* ‘referred to as *ummai*, and the quotative particle *eṇa* (with its variant *eṇru*).³⁰ Among the other groups, three, namely a., c. and g., are treated elsewhere inside the *Tolkāppiyam*. More specifically, the first group (a.) has been discussed in the first book, where it is called *cāriyai*,³¹ a designation which is used 36 times inside the “*Adhikāra* on Letters”; the third group (c.) is discussed both in the first and the second book, and it receives the greatest degree of attention in the second chapter (“on case”) and the third chapter (“on case mixture”) of the second book;³² the seventh group (g.) is discussed inside the “Chapter on comparison”, the seventh chapter of the third book of the *Tolkāppiyam*. However, the second type of particle (type b.), is not described at all inside the *Tolkāppiyam*, although the notion of “time/tense” (*kālam*), with which it is supposed to be associated,³³ is invoked rather frequently. The commentators are quick to point out that this incompleteness feature of the *Tolkāppiyam* (i.e. referring to a type of particle which it does not describe or enumerate) had been announced in TE482i,³⁴ which is the penultimate sūtra inside its first book. The fact that *kālam* “time/tense” is an important parameter for Tamil grammarians is also seen from the fact that the first three sūtra-s of the *Viṇaiyiyal* “Chapter on verb/action” refer to it when they say:

²⁹ *Avaitām // puṇariya ṇilaiyīṭaip poruṇilaik kutavunavum // viṇaiceyaṇ maruṅkiṛ kālamotu varunavum // vērṛumaip poruḷvayi ṇurupā kunavu // macainilaik kiḷavi yāki varunavu // micainiṛaik kiḷavi yāki varunanun // tattaṅ kuṛippīṛ poruḷcey kunavu // moppil valiyār poruḷcey kunavumeṇ // ṛappaṇ piṇavē nuvaluṅ kālai.* (TC250c)

³⁰ Considerations of space prevent me from summarising here the content of this chapter. See Chevillard[1996: 384-431] for a translation of the sūtras and of Cēṇāvaraiyar’s commentary, which provides many examples.

³¹ *Cāriyai* is often translated as “empty morph”. To explain its use according to Tamil grammarians in a (simplified) nutshell, it can be said that in the sandhi between a noun, such as *maram* “tree” and a verb such as *veṭṭiṇāṇ* “he cut”, we shall first see insertion of the accusative (or second case) suffix “-ai”, (i.e. a particle of type c.), and then interposition of the *cāriyai* “*attu*” (i.e. a particle of type a.), between *maram* and *-ai*. After the application of a certain number of sandhi rules, the sequence “*maram + attu + -ai + veṭṭiṇāṇ*” will become “*marattai veṭṭiṇāṇ*”. It has been posited that *cāriyai*-s are ancient case markers. The sūtra TE120i enumerates nine of them (*iṇ, varru, attu, am, oṇ, āṇ, akku, ikku* and *aṇ*), but says there are others.

³² See Chevillard[1996: 140-228].

³³ The sūtra says: “Being that [type of particle] which comes along with tense/time in the making of a verb/action” (cf. supra 13). Cēṇāvaraiyar explains that a verbal form can be split into three parts: initial, medial and final. See Chevillard[1996: 387], parag. 250-3.

³⁴ See P.S. Subrahmanya Sastri [1930: 80] for an English translation.

- (14) “That which is called *viṇai* ‘action/verb’ does not take (*koḷḷātu*) case (*vēṛṛumai*), but, if we think of it (*niṇaiyum kālai*), it is manifested with *kālam* ‘tense/time’” (TC198c)³⁵
- (15) “They say that the *kālam*-s ‘tense/time’ are three” (TC199c)³⁶
- (16) “In their manifestation (*tōṇṇal-āṛu*), the three tense/time (*kālam*), namely ‘of the past’ (*iṛappiṇ*), ‘of the present’ (*nikaḷviṇ*) and ‘of the future’ (*etirviṇ*), possess (*uṭaiya*) [against the appearance] the true/real state (*meynṇilai*) of being taken [into account] (*koḷḷum*) also with the *kuṛippu*³⁷ [*viṇai*].” (TC200c)³⁸

Interestingly, what is nowadays referred to as “present tense”, i.e. the modern form with an infix *-kiṇṇ-* did not exist at the time of the *Tolkāppiyam*, where the basic morphological opposition inside the verbal paradigm is between a set of “past” forms and a set of “non-past/habitual” forms, and we see the present forms appearing only a few centuries later. What the text gives us is therefore very far from being a morphological description of an existing language.

It seems therefore that we must conclude from such pieces of evidence that the *Tolkāppiyam*, as we have it, was conceived by its authors as a kind of “work in progress”, as is also seen in the injunctions found in several sūtras placed at the end of chapters, exhorting the student to use his own judgement in order to extend, by analogy, what has been enunciated inside the chapter. Another possible explanation, which I have heard from the mouth of my late teacher, T.V. Gopal Iyer, is that important components of that literature have been lost³⁹. In both cases, structural incompleteness of the existing text or loss of texts which existed, we may have to admit the same kind of explanation: lack of interest (in society ?) in grammar and lack of infrastructure,⁴⁰ both resulting in *centamiḷ* being grammatically UNDER-DESCRIBED. This is not to deny that what remains of Tamil śāstric literature is certainly impressive in its complexity!

Which of the two lists is ‘the four words’ (*nāṛ-col*) in TP385i?

We now return to our starting point, with a more precise view of the global technical landscape, and examine one of the sūtra-s of the *Ceyyūḷiyal* “Chapter on [poetic] composition”, longest and penultimate chapter in the *Poruḷatikāram* “Adhikāra on (poetical) Matters” (see chart A, third column), in which the seventh among the 34 limbs⁴¹ of poetry, namely *marapu*, is characterised, and in which the expression *nāṛ-col* “the four words” is found inside the characterisation. That expression, however, is explained in slightly divergent ways by the three commentators on the *Ceyyūḷiyal*, namely Iḷampūraṇar, Pērāciriyaṇ and Nacciṇārkkīṇiyaṇ. The local context for the statement is a progression where the successive limbs have been enumerated, starting with *māttirai*

³⁵ *Viṇaiyeṇap paṭuvatu vēṛṛumai koḷḷātu // niṇaiyuṅ kālaik kālamoṭu tōṇṇum* (TC198c).

³⁶ *Kālan tāmē mūṇṇeṇa molīpa.* (TC199c)

³⁷ The *kuṛippu viṇai* has been referred to by some as an “appellative verb”. I translate the term as “verbe idéal” in Chevillard[1996: 304]. The linguistic items which are labelled as such by Tamil grammarians can mostly be described (in an impressionistic way) as adjectives in predicative position, such as *kariyaṇ* “he is/was/will be black”.

³⁸ *iṛappi nikaḷvi etirvi ṇeṇṇā // vammuk kālamuṅ kuṛippoṭuṅ koḷḷu // meynṇilai uṭaiya tōṇṇa lāṛē* (TC200c).

³⁹ He used to say that the *Tolkāppiyam* was only a small book, meant for beginners, and that this was the reason why many topics were not fully dealt with inside it.

⁴⁰ Another possible explanation is that there was a strong brain-drain towards Sanskrit studies in the Tamil-speaking South.

⁴¹ I have discussed the limbs of poetry in Chevillard[2011a].

“measurement, duration”, and continuing with *eḷuttu* “Level-1 metrical unit⁴²”, *acai* “Level-2 metrical unit”, *cīr* “foot”, *aṭi* “metrical line”, which is the fifth limb. This culminates in the sixth limb, *yāppu* “[the act of] composing (lit. “tying””, which is used for referring to (semantically) complete compositions, which can belong to one among seven loci (*eḷu nilam*): song/verse (*pāṭṭu*), speech/commentary (*urai*), treatise (*nūl*), mantra (*vāy-moḷi*), riddle (*pici*), satirical poem (*aṅkatam*) and proverb (*mutu-col*). The limbs which are enumerated and characterized from then onwards, upto the 26th limb (*vaṅṅam*) look like secondary limbs, ancillary to *yāppu*, because they are not really constitutive parts (as a line is to a poem) but descriptive attributes (specifying this or that feature). They will be followed by eight additional limbs (27th limb to 34th limb) which look in fact like genre names inside a budding genre classification.⁴³ This context being provided, we can now turn to the characterization of *marapu* as the seventh limb, which reads thus:

(17) *marapē tāṅṅum // nārcol liyalāṅ yāppuvalip paṭṭaṅṅu* “And as for *marapu*, it has [always] followed (*valip paṭṭaṅṅu*) *yāppu* (“composing”), by the nature/power (*iyalāṅ*) of the four words” (TP385i)

As already announced, **(A)** we must now face slightly contradictory opinions, voiced by the three commentators, and **(B)**, additionally, we should explain what the word *marapu* means, for a student of the *Tolkāppiyam*, who has already studied other parts of the treatise. Concerning the first point (A), it can be said that:

- Iḷampūraṅar thinks that the expression “the four words” refers to the abcd fourfold list (i.e. “*iyar-col* (a), *tiri-col* (b), *ticai-c-col* (c) & *vaṭa-col* (d)”), and he further explains that “*iyar-col*” itself is to be subdivided into four items: “*peyar-c col* (1), *viṅai-c col* (2), *iṭai-c col* (3) and *uri-c col* (4)”.
- Pērācīriyār thinks that “the four words” refer to the list “*peyar-c col* (1), *viṅai-c col* (2), *iṭai-c col* (3) and *uri-c col* (4)”, but that it is also acceptable to say that they refer to the abcd list. He elaborates on the term *iyalāṅ* (“by the nature/power”) contained in sūtra TP385i (which in his commentary is numbered TP392p) by explaining that it means ‘*nārcollīṅaiyum ulakattār vaḷaṅkukiṅṅa vaḷakku vaṭiviṅāṅ*’ (“by the shape (*vaṭivu*) of the [ordinary] usage (*vaḷakku*) [following] which people in the [ordinary] world (*ulakattār*) make use (*vaḷaṅkukiṅṅa*) of the four words”). He further explains that the point in invoking *marapu* as a limb of poetry is to state that there is no [grammatical] difference between *vaḷakku* “ordinary usage” and *ceyyuḷ* “[poetic] composition” and illustrates this by taking suitable ordinary sentences and putting them inside the mould of the four standard meters (*ācīriyam*, *veṅpā*, *kalippā* and *vañci*). However, after giving this explanation, he starts to draw, as is customary with him, many additional conclusions from this sūtra, which I cannot fully explain here, the first one being that, although we find archaic/obsolete expressions in ancient poems belonging to *akkālam* (“that time”), a poet belonging to *ikkālam* (“this time”) should not use them, because this would not be in conformity with *marapu*. However, he should also not condemn them when they are genuine parts of an ancient poem.

⁴² Inside Chart A, column 1, I have proposed “letter” as an approximate translation for *eḷuttu*. In the context of metrics however, approximate translations are not really useful.

⁴³ This trend becomes autonomous when the *Pāṭṭiyāl* branch of the sāstric description of Tamil (language and literature) appears, which seems to have been the case when the *Vaccaṅṅanti Mālai* (alias *Veṅpāp Pāṭṭiyāl*) was composed by Kuṅṅavīra Paṅṅitar, possibly in the 12th century (See Cuppiramaṅiyāṅ [2007: pp. 194-202])

- Nacciṅārkkīṇiyar, in whose commentary the sūtra should be referred to as TPcey80n, thinks that the expression “the four words” refers to the abcd list, and, like ḷampūraṇar, says that the first element is further subdivided into the four starting with *peyar-c col*. In his initial word-for-word commentary, he specifies that the respect given to *marapu* consists in staying away from the “seven types of faults” (*eḷu vakai vaḷu*),⁴⁴ as in ordinary usage (*vaḷakku*). In his additional elaborations, he explains that the reference to *marapu* also means that there can be differences in usage due to the time/period and to the place. He also points out that there may also be difference in the usage appropriate for stage performance.

All this seems to demonstrate a hesitation between the desire to state that the language of poetry (and, by extension, the language of stage performance) is not essentially different from ordinary language and the desire to state that poetry also possesses its own specificities. And this is accomplished by invoking a term, “tradition” (*marapu*), which is one of the most pervasive but, at the same time one of the least specific terms inside the whole grammatical vocabulary, belonging so to speak to a pre-grammatical age. And this brings us back to task (B), namely to explain in a nutshell what *marapu* means.

Inside the text of the *Tolkāppiyam* itself, the word *marapu*, under various forms (*marapin*, *marapiṇa*, etc.) occurs 87 times, which makes it quite a frequent item, and it always seems to be an acknowledgment of the fact that the properties of the linguistic items examined may seem conventional/arbitrary but we cannot change them. The word *marapu* is also found in the received titles (as transmitted by the commentators) of five of the sections of the *Tolkāppiyam*, such as for instance *Nūṅ-marapu* “Usages for the [grammatical] Śāstra (*nūḷ*)”, first chapter of TE,⁴⁵ where the śāstric terminology and conventions are first introduced, *Viḷimarapu* “Usages for the vocative (*viḷi*)” (chapter TC4) and *Marapiyal* “Chapter (*iyal*) about usages”,⁴⁶ which starts with a long section of almost 60 sūtras, in which are detailed the specific nouns used for referring to the males, females and the young of various animal species.

As a counterpoint to *marapu*, another term which we have seen mentioned by the commentators is *vaḷu* “fault”. Having a clear, intuitive, grasp of *marapu* and of *vaḷu* seems to be assumed as a minimal requirement for grammatical thought, but it is of course only possible to insiders. In the two endeavours which we have been examining, namely describing/normalizing the language (i.e. “pure grammar”) and describing/normalizing the literature, these two basic terms (*marapu* and *vaḷu*) play a crucial role, and the real task of a grammarian, the effort which resulted in the *Tolkāppiyam* being composed, consisted in extracting from the implicit *marapu*, i.e. from the native intuition of competent speakers, and from their experience as “connoisseurs” of literature, the parameters which would make it possible to state explicitly why a faulty utterance is faulty (and why a correct one is correct). For instance, in the realm of words (*col*) and in the concomitant realm of “things, values” (*poruḷ*) [Skt. *artha*], one such parameter was *tiṇai*, a term originally used for referring to a “class, caste, tribe”, which was introduced into the grammatical vocabulary, and became part of a two-level classification, also including the concomitant *pāl* “division”. The

⁴⁴ See the list of seven *vaḷu* in footnote 15.

⁴⁵ I must also mention the second and the fifth chapters of TE, *moḷi-marapu* “received knowledge concerning word-forms (*moḷi*)” and *tokai-marapu* “[additional] compendium”.

⁴⁶ *Iyal* literally means “nature”, and we might want to translate the title literally as “Nature of usages”, but that might be over-translation.

grammarians started to talk of the “two (grammatical) *tiṇai-s*”⁴⁷ and the “five *pāl-s*” (or genders). Those were 1. the “superior *tiṇai*” (*uyar-tiṇai*), and its three subdivisions (*pāl*), namely “masculine”, “feminine” and “epicene-plural”; 2. the “NON-(superior) *tiṇai*” (*akṛiṇai*), and its two subdivisions, namely “neuter-singular” and “neuter-plural”. The expression *uyar-tiṇai* is found in the auspicious initial position in the TC. The category of *tiṇai* plays, somehow, the role of a mediator between words and things, because it is emblematic of Tamil grammar, and the topic occupies a substantial share of chapter TC1, *Kiḷavi-y-ākkam*. We find for instance in its 11th sūtra the injunction not to have a “discrepancy” between “the linguistic element which signals *pāl* ‘gender’ in a noun” and “the linguistic element which signals *pāl* in a verb” (see Chevillard[1996: 55]). The noun and the verb are obviously understood in this sūtra to be part of the same sentence.⁴⁸ This is the occasion for a commentator such as Cēṇāvaraiyar to start enumerating the possible types of “fault” (*vaḷu*), starting with *tiṇai vaḷu*.⁴⁹ Among those, one is called *marapu-vaḷu* “fault with respect to [lexical?] usage” and he explains it as deviation pertaining to a non-motivated designation, giving as an example the fact that someone who takes care of goats is called *iṭaiyaṇ* and someone who takes care of elephants is called *pākaṇ*, and that mixing up the two designations is a *marapu vaḷu*. This resembles the type of problem discussed in the *Marapiyal*: the designations for the males, females and the young of animals.

Another perspective on “the four words”

I have now completed a preliminary examination of the “four words” topic inside the *Tolkāppiyam*, and this may have given the reader a preliminary idea of what can be achieved by a study of that important ancient and archaic⁵⁰ treatise. Instead of an elusive conclusion, and in order to open a new line of exploration, that has only been hinted at, it would be useful to examine another text, in which the abcd list (a. *iyarcol*, b. *tiricol*, c. *ticaicol* & d. *vaṭacol*) is mentioned. That text is an anonymous commentary (*Arum patavurai* “commentary on difficult words”) on the *Cilappatikāram*, one of the well-known masterpieces of Tamil Literature, translated many times, and into various European languages, but never completely satisfactorily, because it contains too many technical allusions to śāstra-s which have not been well preserved in transmission. The passage concerned is in the third Canto, *Arāṅkēṟṟuk kātai*, which describes in great detail the education of the dancing girl Mātavi, and the skills possessed by the six teachers⁵¹ who train her. Among those teachers, two are said to be competent in *tēcikam*, and this is the term concerning which the commentator invokes the abcd list in his explanation. One is the music teacher (*icaiyāciriyaṇ*) and the other one is the drumming teacher (*taṇṇumaiyāciriyaṇ*). The general intention of the author of the *Cilappatikāram* seems to be to emphasize that, although each teacher is a master of his own art, he has also mastered the other branches taught by the other teachers. In this context, the word *tēcikam* (probably ultimately derived, with an adjectival suffix, from Skt. *deśa* “country”) is used for referring to the linguistic

⁴⁷ In the same way, the description of literature uses the term *tiṇai* for naming two sets of “seven *tiṇai-s*” (or “conventional situations”), which are enumerated in chapters TP1 and TP2 of the “*Adhikāra* on [Poetical] Matters” (see chart A).

⁴⁸ Regarding the legitimacy of using a word such as “sentence” in order to refer to the conceptions of Tamil grammarians, see for instance Chevillard [2008a: p.16, fn.21, and pp. 493-501].

⁴⁹ See footnote 15.

⁵⁰ Gopal Iyer[2008] is an attempt at enumerating the traces of Vedic culture visible in the *Tolkāppiyam*. As is frequent in Tamil Nadu, he seems to treat as history a legendary fact such as the flood supposed to have destroyed the early Tamil academies. The article is nevertheless a mine of information very much worth reading.

⁵¹ The six teachers are (1) the dancing master, (2) the music master, (3) the composer of songs, (4) the drumming master, (5) the flutist and (6) the lute player.

competence possessed by the music teacher, which is, along with other skills, necessary if he is to match together words and music:

- (18) **tēcikat** *tiruvi ṅōcai kaṭaippiṭittu // tēcikat tiruvi ṅōcai yellā // māciṅ ruṅarnta vaṅviṅa ṅāki* “having fully learned/grasped (*kaṭaippiṭittu*) the sounds (*ōcai*) of auspiciousness/ sacredness (*tiruvīṅ*) from [foreign] countries/regions (*tēcikaṃ*), having become one who knows (*aṅviṅaṅ āki*) without fault (*ācu iṅru*) the sacred sounds of the countries” (Cilampu, III, 30-32, edited by Cāmināta Aiyar[1927]).

In a similar way, the drumming master is described as:

- (19) *āṭal pāṭa licaiyē tamiḷē // paṅṅē pāṇi tūkkē muṭamē // tēcika meṅṅivai yāci ruṅarnta* “having understood (*uṅarntu*) in a subtle way (*āciṅ*) dancing (*āṭal*), singing (*pāṭal*), music (*icai*), [the varieties of] Tamil (*tamiḷ*), musical modes (*paṅ*), the rhythms (*tāḷam*), the keeping of measure (*tūkku*), the defects [to be avoided] (*muṭam*) and the [languages of] the countries (*tēcikaṃ*)” (Cilampu, III, 45-47, edited by Cāmināta Aiyar[1927]).

In both cases, the commentator replaces in his gloss the expression *tēcikaṃ* by the list abcd.⁵² Should we consider that in doing that he is giving us a faithful interpretation of what the author of the *Cilappatikāram* was expressing? The answer is probably: no. The commentator is trying to mediate between two domains, (**α**) the domain of those who have studied traditional Tamil grammar and who will be familiar with the abcd list, seen as the symbol of an attempted description of the complexities of Tamil literature, and (**β**) the domain of those who have, possibly, explored the vast domain of stage performance, for which the best-known work is the *Nāṭya Śāstra*. They may be familiar with a statement contained in that work, containing another enumeration:

- (20) “in connection with the dramatic representation, it (the Pkt. recitation) is of three¹ kinds, viz, that with the same words [as in Sanskrit] (*samāna-śabda*), that with corrupt (*vibhraṣṭa*) words and that with words of indigenous origin (*deśi*).” (*Nāṭya Śāstra* (XVIII, 3), translated by Gosh, 1967: 321)⁵³

We are left wondering what happens when a statement made with one language (Sanskrit) in mind is adapted to another linguistic context (the Tamil context) in which the old (Sanskrit-centered) point of view must now coexist with parameters which were initially not taken into consideration. If Tamil śāstric grammarians tried to adapt to Tamil, by inverting or decentering its logic, the tripartite scheme consisting of A. *tatsama* (or *samāna-śabda*), B. *tadbhava* (or *vibhraṣṭa*) and C. *dēśi*, they could indeed obtain the scheme **a. iyaṅ-col**, **b. tiri col** and **c. ticaic col**, to which they had to add a fourth group, **d. vaṭa-col**, encompassing the Sanskrit and Prakrit words used in Tamil, and which itself had to be subdivided into two subgroups, depending on (**d1**) whether those Northern words avoid the “(specifically) Northern letters” (*vaṭa-v-eḷuttu*) or (**d1**) whether they have had to be adapted to the phonology of Tamil because the original form did contain “(specifically) Northern letters”. But all this requires further study.

⁵² In this he is followed by a later commentator, whose name is Aṭiyārkkū Nallār.

⁵³ Gosh adds in a footnote: [¹ Later Prakrit Grammarians called the above three classes of words *tatsama*, *tadbhava* and *dēśi* respectively].

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