THE PRONOUN AND ADVERBIAL SYSTEMS IN CEYLON TAMIL:
A GRAMMATICAL STUDY

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The various Tamil-speaking communities

The Sinhalese and the Tamils form the two major linguistic
groups in Sri Lanka. The Tamil-speaking population consists of
the Sri Lanka Tamils, the Indian Tamils, the Sri Lanka Moors
and the Indian Moors. The census of 1971 gives 3,464,632 as
the combined strength of the Tamil-speaking groups in Sri Lanka.
They thus constitute more than a quarter of the total population
of the republic.

The Sri Lanka Tamils, though found all over the island in
scattered settlements, predominate in the Northern and Eastern
Provinces which are counted as their traditional homelands and
also in the greater Colombo area. Outside the Northern and
Eastern Provinces, their distribution tends to be markedly urban.
The Sri Lanka Tamils constitute 11.1 per cent of the total popula-
tion of the country.

The Indian Tamils are mostly employed in the plantations in
and around the hilly districts in the centre of the island. They
who have emerged as a significant element in the island’s popula-
tion during the last few decades form a separate community
which is slightly larger than the Sri Lanka Tamil community.
The Indian Tamils have for the most part tended to maintain
their ties with their places of origin in South India and are often
regarded as people without permanent interests in Sri Lanka.
Though the Tamil language and the Hindu religion are common to them and the Sri Lanka Tamils other factors such as differences of historical background, economic levels, occupation and caste have helped to keep the two communities apart (See Kearney 1967: 103).

Of the Sri Lanka Moors about a third live in the Eastern Province intermingled with the Tamils while another third live on the west coast from Mannar to Kalutara. The rest are found scattered throughout the island. The Indian Moors are recent immigrants to the island and have never lost their ties with India. They are mostly engaged in trade. Apart from other factors, even in their use of the Tamil language (See Sanmugadas 1974), the Indian and Sri Lanka Moors as well as Indian Tamils show marked differences from the Sri Lanka Tamil community.

**Pronouns versus nouns**

The pronoun system in Ceylon Tamil comprises personal, demonstrative, interrogative, distributive, reflexive pronoun and pronoun of place. The third person and the demonstrative pronouns betray morphological identity. Pronouns can occur as subject or in finite position. Syntactically, there are differences between pronouns and nouns. In Tamil, pronouns cannot be preceded by all types of adjective (See Agesthialingom: 1967, p. 23).

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{e.g.} & \quad \text{athu avan thaan} & \text{‘it is he’} \\
& \quad \text{aanta avan thaan} \\
& \quad \text{nalla manican} & \text{‘good man’} \\
& \quad \{ \text{nhaan} \} \\
& \quad \{ \text{avan} \} \\
& \quad \{ \text{evan} \} \\
& \quad \{ \text{ivan} \} \\
& \quad \text{oru aalh} & \text{‘a person’}
\end{align*}
\]
Optional gender distinction

Gender distinctions can only be made in the third person. Deitic pronouns which are essentially non-human are sometimes used to refer to human beings and so they have to be recategorized in such instances. Because of this recategorization, gender distinction is optional even in the third person pronouns.

Singular

e.g.  avan 'he',  ava 'she',  athu 'it or he or she'

Plural

avangkalh 'they (masculine), avalhave 'they (feminine)'
athukalh 'those things or persons'
ave 'those things or persons'
avekalh 'those things or persons'

Honorable pronouns as terms of address and reference

There are certain honorable uses of pronouns in terms of the relative status or degree of intimacy of the participants in speech. Such honorable use of pronouns is restricted to the second and third persons. Social change in Ceylon has been relatively slow in sociolinguistic rules. A social selector for age, caste and rank in life determines the choice of pronouns as terms of address or reference.

nhii, avan and avath are forms used in referring to inferiors and intimate friends. Inferiors might be lower in age, social class, professional rank or ethnic group or be domestic servants. It is an effrontery for a younger person to address an elder as nhii within the family. Sex of addressee seems to be a determining
factor. The male as the breadwinner of the family dominates. The husband often uses nhii and receives nhiingkalh from his wife and children.

The use of nhiir is widespread among people within a given profession and social milieu. The use of this term implies a sense of solidarity among classmates, colleagues and intimate friends. The use of the form nhaam is very restricted. The washerman or the woman who sells vegetables may use this form out of politeness to customers.

nhiinkal is used in status-marked settings where the form of address of each person is derived from social identity. In status-oriented interactions like employer-employee, lawyer-client, doctor-patient, teacher-student and tradesman-customer, an asymmetrical form of address is used. The dominating individual uses nhii and receives nhiingkalh. The criteria for judging a person’s superiority rests on various factors like age, caste and profession and the superior is bound to retort when insulted by an imperfect choice of address. Personal relationship is often masked in such encounters.

The asymmetry in the use of nhii, nhiir and nhiingkalh occurs when an interaction between two strangers takes place. As soon

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Second Person</th>
<th>Singular</th>
<th>Honorific Singular</th>
<th>Plural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nominative: nhii 'you'</td>
<td>nhiir 'you'</td>
<td>nhiingkalh 'you'</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>nhaam 'you'</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oblique: um</td>
<td>um</td>
<td>unngkalh</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Third Person</th>
<th>\begin{itemize}</th>
<th>Plural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Masculine: avan 'he'</td>
<td>avar 'he'</td>
<td>avangkalh 'they (masculine)'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feminine: avalh 'she'</td>
<td>ava 'she'</td>
<td>avalhave 'they (feminine)'</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
as the formal introduction is over, the rest of the conversation is carried on with the right type of pronominal forms of address.

Thus a hierarchy even within the members of a single family or working group can be distinguished by these levels of discrimination.

Even in the case of honorific pronouns there is concord between the pronoun and the verb in gender and number.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{e.g.} & \quad \text{nhiir vaaRiiroo} & \text{‘are you coming?’} \\
& \quad \text{nhiingkalh vaaRiingkalhoo} & \text{‘are you coming?’} \\
& \quad \text{avar vaaRavar} & \text{‘he comes (habitual)’} \\
& \quad \text{ava vaaRava} & \text{‘she comes (habitual)’}
\end{align*}
\]

**Pronouns in adverbial position**

All the pronouns have the potentiality of occurring in adverbial positions and in all such instances they take the adverbial suffix -aay.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{e.g.} & \quad \text{avan-aay varuvaanoo} & \text{‘will he come in person?’}
\end{align*}
\]

**Anaphoric use of pronouns**

The following types of pronouns are used anaphorically. Pronouns which can be used to replace those nouns classified as masculine are \(\text{avan} ‘\text{that man}’\), \(\text{ivan} ‘\text{this man}’\), \(\text{wan} ‘\text{that or this man}’\), \(\text{avar} ‘\text{that man}’\), \(\text{ivar} ‘\text{this man}’\) and \(\text{uvar} ‘\text{that or this man}’\). These pronouns cannot be used to replace nouns classifiable as feminine or neuter. Pronouns which can be used to replace those nouns classified as feminine are \(\text{avalk ‘that woman}’\), \(\text{ivalk ‘this woman}’\), \(\text{walk ‘that or this woman}’\), \(\text{awa ‘that woman}’\), \(\text{iva ‘this woman}’\) and \(\text{uwa ‘that or this woman}’\). These cannot be used to replace nouns classifiable as masculine or neuter.

**Morphological correspondence with verbs**

In Sri Lanka Tamil, the personal pronouns bear much morphological correspondence with verbs in the first, second and third persons. But this similarity is found only in the present and
past tense verbs denoting the habitual aspect and the emphatic semantic aspect. Kanapathipillai (1965: 259) mentions some of these forms but fails to discuss the point that pronouns and verbs show morphological correspondence only in the present and past tense verbs expressing the habitual aspect and the emphatic semantic aspect. In the following instances a morphological segmentation would reveal a pronoun + relative particle + person, gender and number termination bearing concordial and homophonous phonological relationship with the subject pronominal. Unlike in nhaan nhallawan ‘I am a good man’, nhaangkalh nhallanhaangkalh ‘we are good people’, etc., one cannot derive the following constructions through an adverbial transformation and the deletion of the copulative verb iru. For a conviction of the morphological correspondence of pronouns and verbs in Sri Lanka Tamil, compare the underlined morphemes in the following examples with the preceding subject pronouns which impose appropriate concordial relationship.

e.g.  
nhaan vaara-nhaan  ‘I used to come’  
nhaan vanta-nhaan  ‘I did come’  
nhaangkalh vaara-nhaangkalh  ‘we used to come’  
nhaangkalh vanta-nhaangkalh  ‘we did come’  
nhii vaara-nhii  ‘you used to come’  
nhii vanta-nhii  ‘you did come’  
nhiir vaara-nhiir  ‘you (honorific) used to come’  
nhiir vanta-nhiir  ‘you did come’  
nhiingkalh vaara-nhiingkalh  ‘you (honorific or plural) used to come’  
nhiingkalh vanta-nhiingkalh  ‘you (honorific or plural) did come’  

etc.

Prefixed pronouns as power-laden terms of reference

There are some disyllabic kinship nominals which begin with a vocalic element in Sri Lanka Tamil. These kinship nominals, in their second person, take a possessive pronominal prefix
ko~koo meaning 'your' and when doing so the stem initial vocalic element is elided. Like other prefixes in the language, the second person possessive pronominal prefix ko~koo is a bound morpheme which occurs only with a class of inalienable nouns such as kinship nominals beginning with a vocalic element.

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nominative Form</th>
<th>Second Person Form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>appu ‘father’</td>
<td>koppu ‘your father’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>akkaa ‘elder sister’</td>
<td>kokkaa ‘your elder sister’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aNNe ‘elder brother’</td>
<td>koNNe ‘your elder brother’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ammaa ‘mother’</td>
<td>konnaa ‘your mother’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aacel ‘grandmother’</td>
<td>koocele ‘your grandmother’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>attee ‘mother’</td>
<td>kootte ‘your mother’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>etc.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sometimes the declined oblique second person possessive pronoun unre ‘your’ is prefixed to these kinship nominals in addition to the complex stems.

Even in the third person, out of respect to elder and dominating members of the family, one speaks in terms of honorific terms of reference. One would prefer appar ‘father’ (honorific singular) to appaa~appu ‘father’ and koppaa ‘your father (honorific singular) to koppaa~koppu ‘your father’. It should be stated here that these prefixed pronouns are more current in the Northern Province than in the Eastern Province. Only a few forms like komane ‘your mother’ and koNNar ‘your elder brother’ occur frequently in the speech of the Tamils of the Eastern Province.

**Adverbs versus adjectives**

With the exception of some verbal nouns derived by the nominalization of verbal roots (e.g. kattu ‘shout’, eRī ‘throw’ etc.) all other nominals are capable of occurring as adverbs in Ceylon Tamil\(^1\) and in all such instances the only adverbial suffix -aay

is suffixed to them. Excluding the above-mentioned class of verbal nouns, all the nominals that can occur as adjectives can also occur as adverbs. Lyons' view (1968: 326–27) that in English certain adverbs are morphologically and transformationally related to the corresponding adjectives and that not all adjectives occur in adverbial positions should be considered a matter of theoretical interest. For this view could as well be extended to Tamil.

*Compare* tīRamaana curuTTu ‘cigar of good quality’
   vaTivaana caTTTe ‘beautiful dress’
   puttaka-k-kaTe ‘bookshop’

*with* ...
   tīRam-aay irukku ‘... is of good quality’
   caTTTe vaTiv-aay irukku ‘the dress is beautiful’
   ...
   puttakam-aay irukku ‘... is in the form of a book’

But not all nominals that can be used as adverbs can be used as adjectives. The first and second person singular forms of pronouns (*nhaan* and *nhii*) which occur as adjectives only in their oblique forms (*en* and *un*) can be used as adverbs.

*Compare* *nhaan viiTuu* enre viiTuu ‘my house’
   *nhii* puttakam, unre puttakam ‘your book’

*with* ...
   nhaan-aay vaanRan ‘I shall come in person’
   nhii-aay vaa ‘you come in person’

**Adverbs as pre-verbal and post-verbal modifiers**

The nominals when used as adverbs occur generally in the pre-verbal modifier position. But the following adverbs of manner are capable of occurring optionally as post-verbal modifiers thereby emphasizing the manner in which the action is to be

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2 The genitive constructions *en viiTuu* ‘my house’ and *un viiTuu* ‘your house’ not occur in the language. Only the declined oblique forms plus nominals such as *enre viiTuu* ‘my house’ and *unre viiTuu* ‘your house’ are found.

3 Kandiah (1967) has not discussed the aspect of adverbs occurring as post-verbal modifiers in Ceylon Tamil.
performed. In such instances, the verb is optionally in the imperative.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre-verbal</th>
<th>Post-verbal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>cuRukk-aay vaa</td>
<td>vaa cuRukk-aay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>keti-y-aay naTa</td>
<td>naTa keti-y-aay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>olhungk-aay-p-paTi</td>
<td>paTi olhungk-aay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kavanam-aay naTa</td>
<td>naTa kavanam-aay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cari-y-aay vay</td>
<td>vay cari-y-aay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>naacam-aay-p-poo</td>
<td>poo naacam-aay</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

‘come quickly’
‘walk quickly’
‘study regularly’
‘walk or behave carefully’
‘place properly’
‘be ruined’

Compare the above adverbial constructions with the following ones in which the verb is in the indicative and not in the imperative mood.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>cuRukk-aay vaaRaan</th>
<th>vaaRaan cuRukk-aay</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘he is coming quickly’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>cuRukk-aay vanhtaan</th>
<th>vanhtaan cuRukk-aay</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘he came quickly’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>cuRukk-aay varuvaan</th>
<th>varuvaan cuRukk-aay</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘he will come quickly’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

etc.

**The coligational possibilities of adverbs**

An adverb can be followed by an adverbial participle.

e.g. kavanam-aay-p-paattu vaangku ‘choose carefully and buy (the good one)’

An adverb could be preceded by another adverb or an adjective or other types of nominal. There is no optimum limit to the number of adjectives and adverbs that can occur before a particular adverb.

e.g. nalla kavanam-aay-k-keelh ‘listen very carefully’
aakkalhukku oree tolle-y-aay-p-paaram-aay iraate ‘do not be troublesome and a burden to people’
References


