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ARTICLES

ON THE TWO LISTS OF ‘FOUR [TYPES OF] WORDS’ (*nār-col*)
IN THE ŚĀSTRIC DESCRIPTIONS OF TAMIL¹

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This article examines, from the perspective of the History of Linguistics, the specifications and the genesis of two distinct lists of four sets of words which are often found in the ancient shastric corpus of the Tamil-speaking South. One of those lists, which is found inside the “pure grammar” component of that technical literature, enumerates ‘nouns’ (*peyarc col*), ‘verbs’ (*viṇaic col*), ‘particles’ (*iṭaic col*), and *uric col* (lit. ‘appropriate words’), whereas the other list, which reflects the fact that one of the main aims of “grammar” was to describe literature, enumerates ‘simple words’ (*iyaṛcol*), *tiricol* (lit. ‘mutant words’ or ‘twisted words’), ‘regional words’ (*ticaic col*), and ‘Northern words’ (*vaṭacol*). In both lists, there is an item for which it is difficult to find a simple translation, namely *uriccol* for the first list and *tiricol* for the second list. The difficulty in identifying and explaining the intention of those who coined those terms seems to be in part due to the fact that the texts which the Tamil tradition has transmitted to us are an assemblage of various parts that were once fragments of a “work in progress”, now fossilized, which was partly abandoned, either because another śāstra (that of lexicography) took over part of the descriptive effort, and/or because the ambition to compile a *dhātu-pāṭha* (the Sanskrit term for a list of verbal roots) for the Tamil language was abandoned, if such a project ever existed. The fact that discontinuities in the transmission of Tamil śāstric literature do exist is attested to, for instance, by the hesitation of traditional commentators, while explaining *sūtra* TP385i (alias TP392p), which is a characterization of *marapu* (approx. ‘usage’), said to be dependent on the power of ‘the four words’. The commentators are cautious in deciding which of the two lists of ‘four words’ is meant, possibly hoping to suggest that the *sūtra* might refer to both, because they believe in the “beauty of compromise”.

KEY WORDS: history of linguistic thought, Tamil shastric literature, parts of speech, word class categorization, *uriccol*

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1. INTRODUCTION

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 of the Tolkāppiyam, an ancient Tamil śāstric text, probably dating back to the first half of the first millennium AD. The first term in that quadripartition is *iyar-col* ‘natural word’, whereas the third and the fourth are *tikai-c-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-l-atikāram*, ‘*adhikāra* on words’.² The first of these sūtras (TC397c), after enumerating the four categories, states that these are all the types of words which can be found, accumulated in a ‘(poetical) composition’ (*ceyyuḷ*), and it is followed by two other sūtras which state that:

- (1) Among them, the natural words (*iyarcol*) are those which resound (*icaikkum*) without deviating (*vaḷāmai*) from their value (*tam poruḷ*) residing (*civaṇi*) within the ordinary usage (*vaḷakku*) [found] in the land (*nilattu*) of Straight³ Tamil (*centamiḷ*). (TC398c)⁴
- (2) [It being the case] EITHER that distinct words (*vēru col*) denote/point to (*kuṛitta*) one value (*oru poruḷ*), OR that one word (*oru col*) points to (*kuṛitta*) distinct values (*vēru poruḷ*), they say (*eṇpa*) that the mutant words⁵ (*tiricol*) have two subdivisions (*irupārru*). (TC399c)⁶

These two are then followed by the sūtra TC400c,⁷ which deals with *ticaic col* “regional words” and for which, because of the word *cērnta*, two interpretations⁸ are possible namely

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

² 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).

³ For a discussion of *centamiḷ* in early Tamil literature, see WILDEN 2009a, who suggests ‘refined Tamil’ as a translation.

⁴ *Avarruḷ // iyarcor rāmē // centamiḷ nilattu vaḷakkoṭu civaṇit // tamporuḷ vaḷāmai yicaiccuṅ collē*. The seven sūtras (TC397c to TC403c), along with their commentary are translated in CHEVILLARD 1996: 470–481.

⁵ The expression *tiri-col* can be analysed as a combination of *col* ‘word’ and *tiri*, which is the (verbal) root of *tiritral* ‘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 as a classificatory sūtra.

⁶ *Oruporuḷ kuṛitta vērucol lākiyūm // vēruporuḷ kuṛitta vorucol lākiyū // mirupār eṇpa tiricor kiḷavi*.

⁷ *Centamiḷ cērnta paṇṇiru nilattiṇu // taṅkurip piṇavē ticaiccor kiḷavi*. (TC400c)

⁸ See Ezhuthachan’s observation: ‘The question is whether Tolkāppiyar’s statement “*Śentamiḷ cērnta paṇṇiru nilattum*” means the 12 lands lying in 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 in the Tamil land which included Kerala in his times.’ (EZHUTHACHAN 1975: 71, fn. 12c).

- (3b) It is in the twelve lands (*paṅṅiru nilam*) adjacent to (*cērnta*) [the country of] Straight Tamil (*centamiḷ*) that the 'regional words' (*ticaic col*) have their denotative power (*tankurippina*).

Having already argued elsewhere⁹ that both interpretations have been used, at different periods, in the course of history, I do not discuss the issue further and shall now give, for the sake of completeness, the two sūtras which deal with the fourth category, namely *vaṭa-col* 'northern word(s)'.¹⁰ They are:

- (4) A linguistic expression (*kiḷavi*) which is [termed] a 'northern word' (*vaṭacol*) is a word (*col*) in which the combining (*puṅarkkum*) [takes place] with/by means of letters (*eḷuttoṭu*) avoiding (*orūi*) [specifically] northern letters (*vaṭaveḷuttu*).¹¹
- (5) Even if corrupted¹² ones (*citaintaṇa*) are met with, [the grammarians] do not exclude (*varaiyār*) those which are acceptable (*iyaintaṇa*).¹³

Those five characterizing sūtras are then followed by a sūtra (TC403c) which states that 'when one strings together (*toḷukkuṅ 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 inṅam*).

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 sūtras translated so far, from (1) to (5), are found at the beginning of the chapter TC9 (see middle column).

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)¹⁴ and by the third book (TP1 to TP9), although the status of TC9 and TP9 is ambiguous.

⁹ I have dealt with *ticaic-col* at length in CHEVILLARD 2008b.

¹⁰ I have discussed *vaṭacol* in CHEVILLARD 2011b.

¹¹ *Vaṭacor kiḷavi vaṭaveḷut torū // veḷuttoṭu puṅarnta collā kummē*. (TC401c).

¹² As a clarification of what "corrupted" means here, i.e. 'adapted', it can be said that, according to the medieval commentator Cēṅavaraiyār, 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).

¹³ *Citaintaṇa varaiṅu miyaintaṇa varaiyār*. (TC402c)

¹⁴ 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).

Chart A: Broad table of content for the three books of the Tolkāppiyam

TE: <i>Adhikāra</i> on letters ¹⁵ (<i>eḷuttu</i>) [9 chapters]	TC: <i>Adhikāra</i> on words (<i>col</i>) [9 chapters] (463 sūtras)	TP: <i>Adhikāra</i> on [poetical] matters (<i>poruḷ</i>) [9 chapters] (656 sūtras) ¹⁶
483 sūtras, dealing with a number of topics, the most visible one being sandhi (<i>puṇarcci</i>).	TC1 (<i>Kiḷaviyākkam</i> ‘the formation of utterances’ OR ¹⁷ ‘the preparation of speech’), TC2 (‘chapter on case’), TC3 (‘case contamination/mixture’), TC4 (‘vocative’), TC5 (‘nouns’), TC6 (‘verbs’), TC7 (‘particles’), TC8 (<i>uric col</i>), TC9 (chapter of the ‘remainder’ [eccam])	TP1 to TP5 (conventions for love and heroic poetry), TP6 (8 rasas theory), TP7 (theory of comparison), TP8 (poetical composition), TP9 (chapter on marapu)

Such a formulation is of course slightly exaggerated, but it echoes the polarity between the twin avowed targets of the Tolkāppiyam, which are *valakku* ‘(educated) ordinary usage’ and *ceyyuḷ* ‘(poetical) composition’, as announced in its preface (attributed to Paṇampāraṇar). 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*,¹⁸ although as will become apparent, Tamil “pure grammar” is not Pāṇinian and remains a work in progress.

¹⁵ 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.

¹⁶ It should be added that the numbers of sūtras 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 Cēṇāvaraiyar’s commentary.

¹⁷ ‘The formation of utterances’ is the translation for the title (*Kiḷavi Ākkam*) of the first chapter of the TC given by K. ZVELEBIL (1978) in his unfinished translation of TC which appeared in 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 in the commentary by Cēṇāvaraiyar (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).

¹⁸ See for instance what PALSULE (1968: 26) writes: ‘*Īyākṛ-* 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 “Tolkāppiyam, who is fully [competent] in Aintiram”’ (... *aintiram niṇainta // tolkāp piyaṇenat tanpeyar tōṛri // ...*).

2. 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 *uricol*’ (100 sūtras),¹⁹ 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’, *vērṛumai* ‘case’, *viḷi* ‘vocative’, etc. It must additionally be emphasized that there is a dissymmetry inside the quadripartition because, as is clearly stated in Tolkāppiyam, in the fourth and fifth sūtras of the *Peyariyal* ‘chapter on nouns’:

- (6) Those who are knowledgeable (*aṟinticinḍōr*) say that what are fit to be called (*eṇap paṭupa*) ‘words’ (*col*) are two (*iranṭu*): ‘noun’ (*peyar*) and ‘action/verb’ (*viṇai*) (TC158c)²⁰
- (7) They say (*eṇpa*) that the linguistic item(s) (*kiḷavi*) [called] *iṭaic col* ‘particle’ and the linguistic item(s) [called] *uric col* appear (*tōṇrum*) following them (*avarṛu vaḷi maruṅkiṇ*) (TC159c)²¹

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 (*kurittaṇa*) towards values/things (*poruḷ*) (TC155c)²²

In that context, if ‘pointing towards a *poruḷ*’ is understood as A NECESSARY CONDITION for [fully] being a word, the reason for the difference in status between the pair {*peyarc col* : *viṇaic 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 *poruḷ* ‘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 (*eṇap paṭupa*) ‘particle(s)’ (*iṭai*) are not autonomous [but] can be used along with noun(s) (*peyar*) and action(s)/verb(s) (*viṇai*) (TC249c)²³

¹⁹ 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 Cēṇāvaraiyar occupy pp. 432–469 in CHEVILLARD 1996, and I elaborate on it in CHEVILLARD 2008a: 484–487. See also CHEVILLARD 2010a.

²⁰ *Colleṇap paṭupa peyarē viṇaiyeṇ // rāyiraṇ ṭeṇpa vaṟintici ṇōrē* (TC158c).

²¹ *Iṭaiccor kiḷaviyu muriccor kiḷaviyu // mavarṛuvaḷi maruṅkiṇ rōṇru meṇpa* (TC159c).

²² *Ellāc collum poruḷkurit taṇavē* (TC155c).

²³ *Iṭaiyeṇap paṭupa peyaroṭum viṇaiyoṭu // naitaipeṇ riyalum tamakkiyal pilavē* (TC249c).

It might at this stage be useful to detail the precise content of the *ṭaiyiyal*, but given that this presentation is intended to be concise, it appears necessary, before returning to *ṭaic 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 *Tolkāppiyam*, in the following way, in two sūtras:

- (10) When one explains in detail (*virikkun̄ kālai*) the linguistic item(s) [called] *uricol* ‘appropriate words’, [it can be said] **1.** [that] they appear (*tōṅṅri*) in connection with sound (*icai*), idea (*kurippu*), or quality (*panpu*), **2.** [that] they are confused (*taṭumāri*) in body (*mey*) with noun (*peyar*) or action/verb (*viṅai*), **3.** [that it may happen that] EITHER (**3a**) the appropriateness (*urimai*) of one [single] word (*oru col*) for several values/meanings/things (*pala poruṭku*) is manifested (*tōṅṅriṇum*), OR [that] (**3b**) the appropriateness (*urimai*) of several words (*pala col*) for one [single] value/meaning/thing (*oru poruṭku*) is manifested, [AND it can be said] **4.** [that] by relating (*cārtti*) the infrequent ones (*payilātavaṅṅrai*) with the frequent ones (*payiṅṅravai*), [the task is] to explain (*kiḷattal*) distinctly (*vēru*) the values/meanings/things (*poruḷ*) of whichever word (*ec col āyiṇum*) wherever they are used (*ceṅṅṅṅilai maruṅkin̄*), as per the tradition of each one (*tattam marapiṅ*) (TC297c)²⁴
- (11) Explanations (*kiḷattal*) are not needed (*vēṅṅā*) for obvious words (*veḷippaṭu col*), [since] they are [needed only] on (*mēṅa*) those *uricol*, which are not obvious (*veḷippaṭa vārā*) (TC298c)²⁵

The reason why I left the item *uricol* ‘appropriate/proper words’ untranslated, may now, after the long (and puzzling) statement in (10), appear 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 *uricol*, 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*.²⁶ 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) *eḷuttatikāratuḷ itaṅai ‘kuraiccorkiḷavi’ enru oṭiṅamaiyāṅ, vaṅaṅulāciriyaṅ tātu enru kuriyiṅṅa corḱalē ivaiyeṅṅu koḷḷappaṭum, avaiyūm kuraiccollātalāṅ.*
‘Since inside his recitation of the *Adhikāra* on Letters [TE482i] he has called

²⁴ *Uriccor̄ kiḷavi virikkun̄ kālai // icaiyiṅṅun̄ kurippin̄um panpin̄um tōṅṅriṅ // peyarin̄um viṅaiyiṅṅu meyaṭu māri // orucor̄ palaporuḷ kurimai tōṅṅriṅ // palacol̄ loruporuḷ kurimai tōṅṅriṅ // payilā tavaṅṅai payiṅṅravai cārtti // tatta marapiṅ ceṅṅṅṅilai maruṅki // neccol̄ lāyiṅṅum poruḷvēru kiḷattal* (TC297c).

²⁵ *Veḷippaṭu collē kiḷattal vēṅṅā // veḷippaṭa vārā vuriccon̄ mēṅa* (TC298c).

²⁶ Concerning this see CHEVILLARD 2009.

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, on TC293t, p.221 in KŌPALAIYAR & ARAṆAMURUVAL 2003)

Teyvaccilaiyār however continues his explanation by saying that if one asks whether ‘all those [expressions] which express the meanings of the actions/verbs’ (*tolīr poruṇmai uṇarttuvāṇa v-ellām*) are going to be recited in this chapter, or, in other words, whether 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.

3. 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*.²⁷ What they did in fact later, on the basis of *urīyiyal*, taken as a *nighaṇṭu* fragment,²⁸ was to compile a series of *kōṣas*, the most ancient preserved (which may also have been the first) being the Tivākaram. Since I have already discussed this topic elsewhere,²⁹ I shall now discuss other instances of “structural incompleteness” found inside the Tolkāppiyam, which are not often discussed. One such instance is found in the *īṭaiyiyal* ‘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 (*īṭai*) of a sandhi-situation (*puṇar-iyal nilai*); **b.** being those which come (*varuna*) along with tense/time (*kālamōṭu*) in the making of a verb/action (*viṇai ceyal maruṅkiṇ*); **c.** being [case]-morphemes (*urupu*), on the occasion of that which has case-value (*vērrumaip poruḷ vayin*); **d.** being those which have [expletive] syllabic status (*acai-nilai*); **e.** being those which are [expletive] metrical complements (*icai-nīrai*); **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).³⁰

In this list of seven types of *īṭaic col* ‘particles’, only three, namely d., e. and f., are actually relevant with respect to the actual content of the *īṭaiyiyal* ‘chapter on particles’, which

²⁷ The huge difficulties in accomplishing such a task can be measured by anyone who reads PALSULE 1961. Tamil grammarians were probably never numerous enough.

²⁸ Compare the injunctions to explain, at the beginning of the *Urīyiyal*, 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’ (*samāmnāyah samāmnātaḥ ; sa vYĀKHYĀTAVYAḤ*), *Nirukta* 1: 1 (SARUP 1926).

²⁹ I have discussed the transition between the *Urīyiyal* and the *Tivākaram* in CHEVILLARD 2010.

³⁰ *Avaitām // puṇariya nilaiyīṭaip poruṇilaik kutavunavum // viṇaiceyaṇ maruṅkiṇ kālamōṭu varunavum // vērrumaip poruḷvayī nurupā kunavu // macainilaik kiḷavi yāki varunavu // micainīyaik kiḷavi yāki varunavum // tattāṇ kuṛippir poruḷcey kunavu // moppil vaḷiyār poruḷcey kunavumeṇ // rappaṇ piṇavē nuvaluṇ kālai* (TC250c).

is an enumeration of the meanings of roughly 45 distinct particles, the two most important, based on the number of sūtras which deal with them, being the coordinative clitic *-um*, referred to as *ummai*, and the quotative particle *eṇa* (with its variant *eṇru*).³¹ Among the other groups, three, namely a., c. and g., are treated elsewhere in the Tolkāppiyam. More specifically, the first group (a.) has been discussed in the first book, where it is called *cāriyai*³² 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;³³ the seventh group (g.) is discussed in 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 in the Tolkāppiyam, although the notion of ‘time/tense’ (*kālam*), with which it is supposed to be associated,³⁴ 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,³⁵ 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 sūtras of the *viṇaiyiyal* ‘chapter on verb/action’ refer to it when they say:

- (14) That which is called *viṇai* ‘action/verb’ does not take (*koḷḷātu*) case (*vērrumai*), but, if we think of it (*niṇaiyūm kālai*), it is manifested with *kālam* ‘tense/time’ (TC198c)³⁶
- (15) They say that the *kālam*s ‘tenses/times’ are three (TC199c)³⁷
- (16) In their manifestation (*tōṇṇal-āru*), the three tenses/times (*kālam*), namely ‘of the past’ (*irappiṇ*), ‘of the present’ (*nikaḷviṇ*), and ‘of the future’ (*etirviṇ*), possess (*uṭaiya*) [against the appearance] the true/real state (*meynnilai*) of being taken [into account] (*koḷḷum*) also with the *kuṟippu*³⁸ [*viṇai*]. (TC200c)³⁹

³¹ 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.

³² *Cāriyai* is often translated as ‘empty morph’. To explain its use according to the 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 *cāriyais* 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.

³³ See CHEVILLARD 1996: 140–228.

³⁴ The sūtra says: ‘Being that [type of particle] which comes along with tense/time in the making of a verb/action’ (see (13) above). Cēṇāvaraiyar explains that a verbal form can be split into three parts: initial, medial, and final. See CHEVILLARD 1996: 387, § 250–253.

³⁵ See P.S. SUBRAHMANYA SASTRI 1930: 80 for an English translation.

³⁶ *Viṇaiyēṇap paṭuvatu vērrumai koḷḷātu // niṇaiyūṅ kālaik kālamotu tōṇṇum* (TC198c).

³⁷ *Kālan tāmē mūṇṇeṇa moḷipa*. (TC199c).

³⁸ The *kuṟippu 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’.

³⁹ *Irappi nikaḷvi ṇetirvi ṇeṇṇā // vammuk kālamuṅ kuṟipputuṅ koḷḷu // meynnilai yuṭaiya tōṇṇa lārē* (TC200c).

Interestingly, what is nowadays referred to as “present tense”, i.e. the modern form with an infix *-kinr-*, did not exist at the time of the Tolkāppiyam, where the basic morphological opposition in 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 lost.⁴⁰ In both cases, structural incompleteness of the existing text, or loss of earlier texts, we may have to admit the same kind of explanation: lack of interest (in society ?) in grammar and lack of infrastructure,⁴¹ both resulting in *centamiḷ* being grammatically UN-DESCRIBED. This is not to deny that what remains of Tamil śāstric literature is certainly impressive in its complexity!

4. WHICH OF THE TWO LISTS IS ‘THE FOUR WORDS’ (nār-col) IN TP 385I?

We now return to our starting point, with a more precise view of the global technical landscape, and examine one of the sūtras of the *ceyyuḷ-iyal* ‘chapter on [poetic] composition’, the longest and penultimate chapter in the *poruḷatikāram* ‘adhikāra on (poetical) matters’ (see chart A, third column), in which the seventh among the 34 limbs⁴² of poetry, namely *marapu*, is characterised, and in which the expression *nār-col* ‘the four words’ is found in the characterisation. That expression, however, is explained in slightly divergent ways by the three commentators on the *ceyyuḷiyal*, ḷampūraṇar, Pērācīriyar, and Nacciṇārkkīṇiyar.

The local context for the statement is a progression where the successive limbs have been enumerated, starting with *māttirai* ‘measurement, duration’, and continuing with *eḷuttu* ‘level-1 metrical unit’,⁴³ *acai* ‘level-2 metrical unit’, *cīr* ‘foot’, and *aṭi* ‘metrical line’, which is the fifth limb. The statement 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 of seven loci (*eḷu nilam*): song/verse (*pāṭtu*), 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, up to the 26th limb (*vaṇṇam*), 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

⁴⁰ 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 in it.

⁴¹ Another possible explanation is that there was a strong brain-drain towards Sanskrit studies in the Tamil-speaking South.

⁴² I have discussed the limbs of poetry in CHEVILLARD 2011a.

⁴³ In 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.

feature). They are followed by eight additional limbs (27th to 34th limb) which look in fact like genre names inside a budding genre classification.⁴⁴ This context being provided, we can now turn to the characterization of *marapu* as the seventh limb, which reads thus:

- (17) *marapē tānum // nārcol liyalāṇ yāppuvaliṭ paṭṭanru* ‘And as for *marapu*, it has [always] followed (*valiṭ paṭṭanru*) *yāppu* (“composing”), by the nature/power (*iyalāṇ*) 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:

- Iḷampūraṇar thinks that the expression ‘the four words’ refers to the abcd fourfold list (i.e. “*iyar-col* (a), *tiri-col* (b), *tikai-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), *viṇai-c col* (2), *iṭai-c col* (3) and *uri-c col* (4)”.

- Pērācīriyar thinks that ‘the four words’ refer to the list “*peyar-c col* (1), *viṇai-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 *iyalāṇ* (“by the nature/power”) contained in sūtra TP385i (which in his commentary is numbered TP392p) by explaining that it means *nārcollinaiyum ulakattār vaḷaṅkukinra vaḷakku vaṭiviṇāṇ* (‘by the shape (*vaṭivu*) of the [ordinary] usage (*vaḷakku*) [following] which people in the [ordinary] world (*ulakattār*) make use (*vaḷaṅkukinra*) 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.

- 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 Iḷampūraṇar, 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*),⁴⁵ 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 time/period and to place. He also points out that there may be difference in the usage appropriate for stage performance.

⁴⁴ This trend becomes autonomous when the *Pāṭṭiyal* branch of the śāstric description of Tamil (language and literature) appears, which seems to have been the case when the Vaccaṅanti Mālai (alias *Veṅpāp Pāṭṭiyal*) was composed by Kuṇavīra Paṅṭitar, possibly in the 12th century (see CUPPIRAMANIYAN 2009: 194–202).

⁴⁵ See the list of seven *vaḷu* in footnote 16.

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 in 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.

In the text of Tolkāppiyam itself, the word *marapu*, under various forms (*marapiṇ*, *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 *nūṇ-marapu* 'usages for the [grammatical] śāstra (nūḷ)', first chapter of TE,⁴⁶ where the śāstric terminology and conventions are first introduced, *viḷimarapu* 'usages for the vocative (*viḷi*)' (chapter TC4), and *marapiyal* 'chapter (*iyal*) about usages',⁴⁷ 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, those 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 grammarians started to talk of the 'two (grammatical) *tiṇai*-s'⁴⁸ and the 'five *pāl*-s' (or genders). Those were 1. the 'superior *tiṇai*' (*uyar-tiṇai*), and its three subdivisions (*pāl*), 'masculine', 'feminine', and 'epicene-plural'; 2. the 'NON-(superior) *tiṇai*' (*akriṇai*), and its two subdivisions, '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

⁴⁶ 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'.

⁴⁷ *Iyal* literally means 'nature', and we might want to translate the title literally as 'nature of usages', but that might be an over-translation.

⁴⁸ In the same way, the description of literature uses the term *tiṇai* for naming two sets of 'seven *tiṇais*' (or "conventional situations"), which are enumerated in chapters TP1 and TP2 of the '*adhikāra* on [poetical] matters' (see chart A).

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.⁴⁹ This is the occasion for a commentator such as Cēṇāvaraiyar to start enumerating the possible types of ‘fault’ (*vaḷu*), starting with *tinai vaḷu*.⁵⁰ Among those, one is called *marapu-vaḷu* ‘fault with respect to [lexical?] usage’ and he explains it as deviation pertaining to a nonmotivated 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 males, females, and the young of animals.

5. ANOTHER PERSPECTIVE ON “THE FOUR WORDS”

I have now completed a preliminary examination of the ‘four words’ topic in 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 archaic⁵¹ treatise. Instead of an elusive conclusion, and in order to open a new line of exploration, which has only been hinted at, it would be useful to examine another text, in which the abcd list (a. *iyaṛcol*, b. *tiricol*, c. *ticaiccol*, 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 śāstras which have not been well preserved in the tradition. The passage concerned is in the third canto, *araṅkērruk kātai*, which describes in great detail the education of the dancing girl Mātavi, and the skills possessed by the six teachers⁵² 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 (*taṇṇumaivyāciriyaṇ*). 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 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 nōcai kaṭaippiṭittu // tēcikat tiruvi nōcai yellā // māciṇ ruṇarnta variviṇa nāki* ‘having fully learned/grasped (*kaṭaippiṭittu*) the sounds (*ōcai*) of

⁴⁹ 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).

⁵⁰ See footnote 16.

⁵¹ Gopal IYER (2008) is an attempt at enumerating the traces of Vedic culture visible in *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.

⁵² 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.

auspiciousness/sacredness (*tiruvīṇ*) from [foreign] countries/regions (*tēcīkam*), having become one who knows (*arivīṇaṇ āki*) without fault (*ācu iṇru*) the sacred sounds of the countries' (Cilappatikāram, III, 30–32, edited by Cāmināta Aiyar 1927).

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

- (19) *āṭal pāṭa licaiyē tamiḷē // paṇṇē pāṇi tūkkē muṭamē // tēcīka meṇṇirivai yāci nūṇarntu* 'having understood (*uṇarntu*) in a subtle way (*āciṇ*) dancing (*āṭal*), singing (*pāṭal*), music (*icai*), [the varieties of] Tamil (*tamiḷ*), musical modes (*paṇ*), the rhythms (*pāṇi*), the keeping of measure (*tūkku*), the defects [to be avoided] (*muṭam*) and the [languages of] the countries (*tēcīkam*)' (Cilappatikāram, III, 45–47, edited by CĀMINĀTA AIYAR 1927).

In both cases, the commentator replaces in his gloss the expression *tēcīkam* by the list abcd.⁵³ Should we consider that in doing so 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 Ghosh 1967: 321)⁵⁴

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.** *iyaṛ-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 themselves had to be subdivided into two subgroups, depending on (**d1**) whether those Northern words avoid the '(specifically) northern letters' (*vaṭa-v-eḷuttu*) or (**d2**) 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.

⁵³ In this he is followed by a later commentator, whose name is Aṭiyārkkū Nallār.

⁵⁴ Ghosh adds in a footnote: 'Later Prakrit Grammarians called the above three classes of words *tatsama*, *tadbhava* and *deśi* respectively'.

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