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# A STUDY OF NEW WORD – FORMATION OF TAMIL LANGUAGE IN MALAYSIA

Thesis submitted to the Bharathiar University in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the award of the degree of  
**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN LINGUISTICS**

by

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This thesis furnishes a clear idea on the current scenario of word-formation in Tamil, particularly in the Malaysian context. A total of 496 words have been collected as data for this study from the nationwide published Malaysian Tamil newspaper; ‘Malaysia Nanban’. This study by and large answered technical questions: word-formation processes, genres and classes of words and identifying linguistic and grammatical weakness and conflicts. Field study has been conducted to answer social questions such as: attitudes of language users, their expectation and suggestions for better word-formation in Tamil. It was found that the language users were not very satisfied with the current progress of word-formation in Tamil. The result obtained from the questionnaire demonstrates that the language users are supportive of language development, particularly in word-formation. The analysis of this study has been divided into three sections based on the source of data viz. newspaper, questionnaire and test sheet. The analyses show that there are thirteen word-formation processes from which compounding are the most popular among them. The study also identified words which are formed by combining more than one process. Based on the analysis it was noted that the genre viz. science and technology acquired the largest amount of words, proving this genre requires more attention to meet the needs of language users. Apart from answering the research questions, this study has contributed a model entitled ‘Model of Stages of Word-Formation’. This model aimed at integrating the stages of word formation in a cohesive manner. The core intention of this model was to incorporate each stage of word-formation to help make the whole process effective and efficient for utilization. In other words, this model tries to present a well-knit word-formation course of action for new words more systematically. It can help reduce the rate of word rejection by language users by serving to form compatible words.





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DECLARATION

CERTIFICATE OF GENUINNESS OF THE PUBLICATION

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**LIST OF ABBREVIATION**

Aj.	-	Adjective
ANW	-	Among the New Words
Av.	-	Adverb
BDNE	-	Barnhart Dictionary of New English
CG	-	Contributing Group
Conj.	-	Conjunction
DBP	-	Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka (Institute of Language and Literature)
Det.	-	Determiners
Etc.	-	Etcetera
IBM	-	International Business Machines Corporation
IPG	-	Institut Pendidikan Guru (Teacher Education Institution)
LD	-	Language Development
LP	-	Language planning
LRNW	-	Longman Register of New Words
N	-	Noun
NCG	-	Non-Contributing Group
P	-	Preposition
PMR	-	Lower Secondary Assessment



Pvt. Ltd / Sdn. Bhd. - Private Limited (Sendirian Berhad)

- RV - Respondent Value
- SMS - Short Message Service
- SPM - Malaysia Certificate of Education (Sijil Pendidikan Malaysia)
- SPSS - Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
- ST - Science and Technology
- STPM - Malaysian Higher School Certificate (Sijil Tinggi Peperiksaan Malaysia)
- UM - University of Malaya
- UPSI - Sultan Idris Education University (Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris)
- UPSR - Primary School Assessment Test (Ujian Peperiksaan Sekolah Rendah)
- V - Verb
- Viz. - Videlicet

# GRAPHEMES OF TAMIL FONTS

## Vowel

a	→	அ
a:	→	ஆ
i	→	இ
i:	→	ஈ
u	→	உ
u:	→	ஊ
e	→	எ
e:	→	ஏ
ai	→	ஐ
o	→	ஓ
o:	→	ஔ
au	→	ஔ

## Consonants

k	→	க	y	→	ய்	ñ	→	ங்
c	→	ச	r	→	ர்	ñ	→	ஞ்
t	→	ட்	l	→	ல்	ṇ	→	ண்
t	→	த்	v	→	வ்	n	→	ந்
p	→	ப்	l	→	ழ்	m	→	ம்
r	→	ற்	l	→	ள்	ṅ	→	ங்



## CHAPTER 1

# INTRODUCTION

### 1.0 Introduction

The mastery of language sets us apart from the animal world. Words are an integral part of language and have evolved through the ages in lockstep with humankind. In linguistics, a word is the smallest element that may be uttered in isolation with semantic or pragmatic content. The term word may refer to a spoken word or to a written word, or sometimes to the abstract concept behind either. Words are important and it is hard to imagine a world without words. The average person uses about 16,000 words a day, which amounts to 112,000 words every week and leaves a grand total of over five million words every year.



### 1.1 Prominence of Tamil

Tamil is one of the longest surviving classical languages in the world. It is described as the only language of contemporary India which is recognizably continuous with a classical past. Tamil belongs to the southern branch of the Dravidian languages. Tamil has the most ancient non-Sanskritised Indian literature. The Tamil Lexicon of University of Madras defines the word 'Tamil' as 'sweetness'. Subramanian and Irulappan (1980) suggests the meaning 'sweet sound' from 'tam'- sweet and 'il'- 'sound'.

Old Tamil preserved many features of Proto-Dravidian, including the inventory of consonants, the syllable structure and various grammatical features. The evolution of Old Tamil into Middle Tamil, which is generally taken to have been completed by the 8th century was characterised by a number of phonological and grammatical



changes. Middle Tamil saw a significant increase in the Sanskritisation of Tamil. Modern spoken Tamil also shows a number of sound changes. Tamil is the official language of the Indian state of Tamil Nadu and one of the 22 languages under schedule 8 of the constitution of India. It is also one of the official languages of the union territory of Puducherry and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. Tamil is also one of the official languages of Singapore. Tamil is one of the official and national languages of Sri Lanka along with Sinhala. Tamil was bestowed a legal status for classical languages by the Government of India and following a political campaign supported by several Tamil associations. Tamil became the first legally recognised Classical language of India. The recognition was announced by the then President of India, Abdul Kalam, in a joint sitting of both houses of the Indian Parliament on 6 June 2004.

## 1.2 Tamil Diction

It is world knowledge that several Tamil words have been borrowed and actively used in everyday English communication. Likewise Tamil words have also undergone a slow yet sure metamorphosis for technical, scientific and many other modern developments and expressions. From the linguistic perspective, transition has taken place in several modes and is actively implemented in newspapers, professional and academic communication.

## 1.3 Background of the Study

This study deals with the word-formation of Tamil language used in Malaysia. The history and development of Tamil language in Malaysia has been explicated with historical evidence. The research incorporates exhaustive information of Malaysian Tamil

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newspapers and their take on Tamil words. The origin, expansion of the Malaysian Tamil newspaper for over a half century is illustrated, precisely to provide a perspective of the survival and history of newspapers in Malaysia; a country where the Tamils are minority.

Subsequently the discussion steers towards word-formation process. It is primarily the subject of study, therefore background information of the topic is significant. Elucidation of word-formation has been carried out taking into consideration that of scholars of linguistics worldwide. Ultimately the research is narrowed down to Tamil language and its words at a world level and gradates to the Malaysian Tamil context in particular.

### 1.3.1 Tamil as a subject in Malaysia

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Tamil language is one of the four chief languages in Malaysia other than Malay, English and Mandarin. According to the Department of Information, Ministry of Communications and Multimedia of Malaysia (2010), 7 percent of the population in Malaysia belong to the Indian community (1.8 million). This percentage includes non-Tamil ethnic groups such as Telugus, Malayalees and Sikhs who speak, read and write Tamil.

In Malaysia, Tamil medium education is offered at the National-Type Primary level Tamil schools. These schools employ Tamil as the medium of instruction. According to the Ministry of Education Malaysia (2010), there are 523 Tamil schools in Malaysia. As Arasaratnam (1970) mentions; the first Tamil school in Malaya was established in 1816 as part of the Penang Free School initiative. The Tamil schools play an important role in the exercise and development of Tamil as an integral language in the country.





Tamil as the medium of instruction is offered from primary one to primary six level. All the subjects except Malay and English are taught in Tamil. The student can sit for the primary national level examination also known as Primary School Assessment Test (UPSR). At the upper secondary level, students can learn Tamil as a subject and sit for examinations such as; the Lower Secondary Assessment (PMR), Malaysia Certificate of Education (SPM) and the Malaysian Higher School Certificate (STPM). Tamil is offered as an elective course at these levels. Tamil is also offered at the Institute of Higher Education such as University of Malaya (UM) and Sultan Idris Education University (UPSI). In addition, there are six teacher training institutes in Malaysia which train teachers to tutor Tamil as a subject at the primary and secondary school levels (Yokambal, 2008).

### 1.3.2 Categorization of media



Hassan (2014) has given a reference according to which mass media is divided into three categories. First is the electronic media which includes internet, computer, tape recorder, mobile phone, compact discs etc. Electronic media provides relatively all types of information. The second category of mass media is broadcasting media. Television and radio belong to this class, they play a significant function in spreading news in a far reaching and efficient manner. The third category is print media, which includes newspapers, magazines, books, etc. This research has focused on the third category; newspaper, with special reference to Tamil newspapers in Malaysia.

### 1.3.3 Background to Tamil Newspapers in Malaysia

According to Tamilvanan (1987), 'Cylon Gajet' and was published in three languages viz. English, Sinhala and Tamil. It was the first Tamil newspaper and was

published in Sri Lanka in the year 1802. In the year 1831 a Christian association started publishing a newspaper at Chennai in India titled 'Tamil Magazine'. The main principle of 'Tamil Magazine' was to reach Christianity among the local community.

Dhandayutham (1973), mentions that the earliest extent Tamil newspaper at Malaysia was published in 1887 in Malaysia. There were three newspapers published during that period namely; 'Ulaga Nesan' and 'Singgai Nesan' which started their publication on 28 March and 27 June, 1887 respectively while 'Hindu Nesan' was published by the end of the same year. However, these newspapers cannot be measured as the first published newspapers in Malaysia because in the view of Dhandayutham (1973), there were previously published newspapers in Tamil that have not been officially documented. 'Ulaga Nesan' has mentioned the earliest newspapers such as 'Vidhya Visarini', 'Vaagai Nesan' and 'Vijaya Ketanan' revealed the existence of several newspapers even before 'Ulaga Nesan'. The newspapers such as; 'Singgai Vartamaani', 'Thanggai Nesan' and 'Nyana Suriyan' have been mentioned by the editor of 'Singgai Nesan' (Maguthum Sayabu) as having a history even before 1887.

Dhandayutham (1973), articulated that the earliest newspapers were primarily influenced by Tamil Nadu newspapers. News about political issues and patriotic articles with reference to India formed the main subject matter of those newspapers. However, after the independence of Malaysia in the 1957 newspapers started publishing local news also focusing on the progress of the Malaysian Tamil community.

Yokammal (2006) has provided a list of Malayan (former name to Malaysia) or Malaysian Tamil newspapers and divided them as follows: i) those started before independence and ii) those started after independence of Malaysia. According to her



statement there were 63 newspapers published since 1875. After the independence of Malaysia as many as 13 newspapers were published up to 2006. According to Krishnan (1988), the Malaysian Tamil newspapers faced their downhill drift in the 1960s and 1970s because of the unemployment crisis among the Malaysian Tamil labour community.

At present there are six dailies published in Malaysia. ‘Tamil Nesan’ is the oldest among all the surviving newspapers since 1924. Followed by it ‘Malaysia Nanban’ and ‘Makkal Osai’ are regularly published since 1989 and 1994 respectively. Very recently that is from 2012 ‘Thinakkural’ and ‘Nam Naadu’ dailies are being published. The sixth newspaper is ‘Tamil Malar’ though it was started in 1960 but stopped its publication later on was revived during the year 2013.



Krishnan (1988), mentions that Malaysian Tamil newspapers are an essential part the Malaysian Tamil community. Virtually the entire Malaysian Tamil history has been recorded by the newspapers and still maintains to do so. Moreover, newspapers also serve as a source of language evolution during the course of time. Therefore, it is reliable to choose daily newspapers as a source of data collection for this study.

#### **1.3.4 Progression of Word-Formation Research**

Hans Marchand (1960) states that word-formation is a part of applied linguistics which studies patterns of lexical units that facilitate configuration of new words in a language. The study of word-formation has been valued since the Paninian time. Panini provided a detailed explanation of word-formation in Sanskrit (Bauer, 1983).





As Bauer (1983) points out the analysis of word-formation was not carried out with momentous consideration in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Adams (1973) states the research of word-formation received insufficient attention because of the distinction between synchronic and diachronic approaches introduced by Saussure. These distinctions have had a profound impact and great influence on language study in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and resulted in the neglect of word-formation study.

Bloomfield (1935) approached word-formation from the synchronic perspective and the same was considered from the diachronic angle by Koziol (1937). However, there were a few linguists like Jespersen (1942) who introduced a fusion of both the methods which yielded most fruitful outcomes.

Bauer (1983), claims the study of word-formation was impressed by Chomskyan revolution after the publication of *Syntactic Structures* in 1957. In the mid-twentieth century, American structuralism accepted *Syntactic Structures* as fundamentally significant in the study of syntax.

As referred to by Adams (1975), the fundamental apprehension of American structuralism was phonology and morphology which implicate phonetic and phonemic features, as well as morphemes and their distribution. Adams also affirms that the Transformational Generative Grammar concentrated on structures such as phrases and sentences.

As Bauer (1983) states, in 1960 Lees worked on the generation of vocabulary using word-formation method within Transformational Generative Grammar framework. He took into account the word constructed as an embedded sentence and not as a single





A publication by Chomsky in the year 1970, channeled the Transformational

Generative Grammar paradigm to pay more consideration to the study of word-formation. The partition of lexicalist and transformationalist approaches for the incorporation of lexical segment is one of the core segments within the transformational school (Bauer, 1983). He adds that, although the assumption that internal shape of words are determined by phonology, this variance conceded the data of word-formation and successfully gained the much required attention to become one of the main interests in the field of linguistics.

Simultaneously a few scholars not belonging to the Transformational Generative Grammar school researched on word-formation studies. Bauer (1983) listed some of the significant works on word-formation study: ‘Categories and Types of Present-Day English Word-formation’ by Marchand (1969), An ‘Introduction to Modern English Word-Formation’ by Adams (1973) along with those studies by Zepic (1970), Brekle (1970), Pennanen (1972). Some scholars such as; Vendler (1968), Bowers (1969), Gleitman and Gleitman (1970), Lakoff (1970), Lees (1970), Newmeyer (1970) and Giurescu (1972) explored word-formation moderately enthused by the Chomsky model (1970).

According to Bauer (1983), the number of linguists operational on word-formation augmented during in the late 1950’s with their individual theoretical axes. For example, Halle (1973) and Lightner (1975) investigated word-formation from the phonological perspective whereas, Jackendoff (1975) and Roeper and Seagel (1978) examined from the syntactic approach, and Leech (1974) and Lyons (1977) worked based on the sematic approach.





Bauer (1983) deems that word-formation research was imbalanced. According to him there is no standard established principle in this field and it due to this theoreticians to postulate theories on their own. However, the study of word-formation incessantly developed and the magnitude of research undertaken has progressively increased in diverse languages.

The evolution of word-formation evidently illustrates that this discipline is emerging very slowly although it is one of the fundamental elements of any language development activity. Nevertheless, some exertion to defend language predominantly in the advancement of novel vocabulary has been carried out. For example, the government of Malaysia assigned an authorized body for language development in 1956 known as 'Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka' (DBP). This body is responsible for the development and has to endorse the activities commenced and completed. This demonstrates the significance given to the research on word-formation.

However, the study of word-formation has never been performed as an autonomous discipline in Tamil language from a wider perspective. Word-formation was recognised as a component of grammatical processes and not as an independent section. In the recent past, scholars from Tamil Nadu in India, such as; Paavaanar, Churatha, Radha Cellappan, Sivalingam, Thanga Manian, Rajendran, Subamanikkanar and Jeya Devan have contributed to the field of word-formation in Tamil language through their research studies. Activities through internet via websites, blogs and social platforms such as Facebook are being carried out by some of the researchers and academic bodies in Tamil Nadu (India). However, the procedures undertaken have an insignificant impact. In Malaysia, Tamil word-formation activities have unsuccessfully tread except for that by



Muniisvaran (2011) who contributed a dissertation and published several academic papers related to this particular area through Mannar Mannan. Hence, this study is anticipated to contribute towards word-formation in the Malaysian Tamil context.

#### 1.4 Statement of the Problem

Language should have the aptitude to acknowledge social changes happening in and around. A language will lose its function if it does not accept evolution; it needs to meet the requirements of the time (Hertzler, Joyce 1965). Changes can take place at diverse levels of language composition particularly in the areas of phonology, lexicon, syntax and semantics (Maraimalai, 2001).

Language transformation occurs in two ways viz. i) planned and ii) unplanned. Planned changes in a language are introduced by language connoisseur, linguists and media. Unplanned modifications take place spontaneously by language users for miscellaneous purposes unconsciously.

In Malaysia, an organization called 'Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka' (DBP) which means 'Institute for Language and Literature' is assigned to endorse Malay as the official and main language of the country. The organization is accountable for language planning activities alongside publishing books in the same language. One vital characteristic of language planning is novel word-formation. DBP has produced thousands of words to meet the requirements of Malay language and would continue to do so till the language achieves adequacy and can be used successfully in various domains (Muniisvaran, 2011).

The scenario of Tamil language in Malaysia is totally different from that of Malay. There is no approved, fully funded government organization or government



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