

ONOMATOPOEIA IN TAMIL

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Annamalainagar

1985

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First Edition : 1985

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Title : Onomatopoeia in Tamil

All India Tamil

Linguistics Association Publication : 25

Language : English

Author : Dr. V. Gnanasundaram

Subject : Linguistics

Price : Rs. 10/-

All India Tamil Linguistics Association

Department of Linguistics

ANNAMALAINAGAR-608002

Novel Art Printers, 137, Jani Jan Khan Road, Madras-600 014.

INTRODUCTION

The present study is the collection of the phonetically motivated or onomatopoeic words in Tamil and the classification of them on the basis of their formal and semantic functions. These words have been collected from the Tamil Lexicon. Tamil Lexicon consists of 1,17,762 words including compounds, dialect variations and borrowings and 580 of them are onomatopoeic words, either single, reduplicated or echo. This shows that 0.5% of words are onomatopoeic in Tamil.

This study has been divided into six chapters. The first chapter gives the onomatopoeic words that are single words. The onomatopoeic expressions which are not duplicated with or without a sound change are taken as single words. These words take the quotative verb *en-* or an auxiliary verb. The occurrence of the nominal suffixes or the occurrence as attributes to nouns are rare.

These form the subdivisions of this chapter. All the single onomatopoeic words take the verb *en-* while the addition of other auxiliary verbs or suffixes is restricted to some of them. Therefore to avoid repetition, the words which take the other auxiliary verbs or suffixes are not given under the head which lists the words taking *en-*. It is to be taken therefore, that all the words whether given under the *en-* group or not will OCCUR WITH THE VERB *en-*.

The second chapter gives the onomatopoeic words that are reduplicated. That is, the onomatopoeic expression always occurs in double and the part of it cannot occur isolated. This type of words is called *irattai-k-kilavi*¹ by Tamil grammarians. They occur with the Quotative Verb *en-*, auxiliary verbs, nominal suffix-*pu* and the verbal noun suffix-*ttal*. The last one shows that a few of these reduplicated words can be conjugated. As in the case of the single words, *en-* can occur with all the words of this type while the occurrence of other auxiliaries and suffixes is restricted to some. Therefore here also if the words are given under the head of adding auxiliaries or suffixes they are not given under-*en* group to avoid repetition. The words which take the nominal suffix-*pu* and the verbal noun suffix *ttal* are not mutually exclusive. A few words which take-*pu* also take-*ttal* while others do not. It shows that only a few words which take the nominal suffix can be conjugated! They have been marked with an asterisk. The reduplicated words also take the agentive suffixes like-*i*, adverbial suffix -*āka/āy*. They also occur as attributes to nouns. A few reduplicated words refer to the objects themselves which produce those sounds. All these form the subdivisions of this chapter.

The third chapter gives the onomatopoeic words that are echoes. These are also reduplicated words but with a difference. When an onomatopoeic expression is duplicated, the duplicated part suffers a sound change. It may be the change of a vowel or a consonant or both. This type of words is further divided into three subdivisions. The first division gives the sequences which are purely onomatopoeic. In the other two divisions the sequences are not of onomatopoeic origin in the strict sense of the term. They consist of a free word, which is not onomatopoeic, either as the first component or the second. The duplicated form is based on this free word and does not occur in other contexts in the language and does not have any meaning of its own. Its form

1. "*irattai-k-kilavi irattin pirinticaiyā*" *tol* 1:48.

is purely motivated from the phonetic form of the free word which precedes or follows it as its other component and on this basis they also come under the category of phonetic motivation. There is also another kind of echo which is very common and regular in formation and can be applied to any word. Here the initial syllable of the words, i.e., (C) V... becomes *ki* in the second echoed part.

The fourth chapter gives the sequences of alliteration and assonance. When the initial sound or syllable recurs in the following word it is taken as alliteration and when the second or the non initial syllable recurs in the following word, it is taken as assonance. These are different from the second and third divisions of the echo words because here both the words can occur in isolation and each has a sense of its own. Here again the combination of two free words is on the basis of phonetic similarity along with semantic similarity and so are considered in this study of phonetically motivated words.

The fifth chapter gives the words which are primary onomatopoeia. "From the semantic point of view, a distinction has to be made between primary and secondary onomatopoeia. Its primary form is the imitation of sound by sound. Here the sound is truly an echo to the sense the referent itself is an acoustic experience which is more or less closely imitated by the phonetic structure of the word"¹

The sixth chapter studies the onomatopoeic value of particular sounds. In a few onomatopoeic words vowels or consonants alternate with other vowels or consonants without affecting the onomatopoeic value of the words. It shows that the same sense is experienced differently and this difference yields different phonetic shapes for the same conception or experience. In some other onomatopoeic words such a change of a vowel or a consonant gives a different

1. Ullmann: 'An Introduction to the Science of meaning' P. 84.

onomatopoeic value altogether. This contrast shows that these vowels or consonants have onomatopoeic significance in these words.

The onomatopoeic words can be studied from the historical point of view also which will cover the loss and acquisition of onomatopoeic value by the words. There is also the study of Sound Symbolism in Tamil. But they have not been attempted in this study for they will exceed the limited scope of this work.