Echo Words

When an onomatopoeic word is duplicated and the duplicated part undergoes a sound change it is called an echo word. The change may be either of vowel or consonant or both either in the first syllable or in the second syllable of the duplicated part. But mostly the change takes place in the first syllable. In one rare case both the syllables have been changed.

e.g. tiinpoçegal "An expression of sound"

There are three subdivisions of echo words. In one case the whole expression is purely onomatopoeic. In the other two types a free word occurs as the first or second part of the echo word. So here the motivated forms are based on the phonetic form of the free word.

Like the onomatopoeic single words and reduplicatives, echo words also bring new distribution of phonemes.
For example ő occurs in the initial position of the word as in

takkušikkegal "The tick-tack sound produced by sabots or slippers while walking"

Regular sandhi alteration operates in the echo words also. For example the nasal before a plosive is assimilated to the homorganic nasal.

tántomegal "Expr. of being wasteful"

When a consonant or a vowel is replaced in the echoed part, some consonants and vowels occur predominantly in the replaced position. The bilabials either the plosive p or the nasal m, are found frequently in the echoed part. p is found in 42 words and m in 32 words out of 82 words where the consonant is replaced. Next comes the palatal c.

As far as the vowels are concerned long or short a alone is changed in the second part. In most of the cases it is changed into the back vowels u or i.

The echo words also take the verb like -eû, the suffixes -ttal, -pu etc. mentioned with single and reduplicated words. They have been given along with the echo words in this chapter. Sometimes they come without taking any suffix.

Echo words are further classified on the basis of the alternation they undergo. They are

1. Vowel alternation: the alternation is either in the first syllable or in the second syllable of the echoed word

2. Consonant change

3. Consonant plus vowel change

4. Addition/loss of consonants.

There is another type of echo word. The initial syllable of any word i.e. (C) V - is changed into ki - and added to it.

e.g. ašukitu, mašukitu etc.

This duplication gives the meaning "thing(s) like that which is denoted by the basic form". Any word can be duplicated in this way and so a list of this type of echo words is not given here.

i. Complete Onomatopoeia

As mentioned above, the echo words where neither of the two parts is a free word are given under this head. The words that come under this category are 79 out of 121 echo words.

1. Vowel Change

(a) ã > u
Low back short/long vowel is changed into high back short/long vowel in the echoed part in 5 words.

kačukučenāl  *Whispering in the air*
kaṭuṭuṭuatāl  *To gabble; rattle in speaking*
kappukupukkenāl  *Gurgling of water*
kalukulutāl  *Confused noise due to various low sounds*
kākēvenāl  *Expression as in wailing*
(b)  ā > ō

Low back short/long vowel is changed into mid back short/long vowel in the echoed part in 4 words.

naḷunotuttāl  *To be soft and moist*
kaḷukolegāl  *Soft and slippery as jelly*
tantuṃeṅal  *Expr. of being wasteful*
tantuṃeṅal  —do—
(c)  ā > ī

Low back long vowel is changed into high front long vowel in the echoed part in 3 words.

ṭakkumṭikkumāy  *In a neat or well dressed manner*
ṭakkuttikkenāl  *The tick-tack sound produced by sabots or slippers while walking*
tantuṃeṅal  *Expr. of music sound*
tantuṃeṅal  *Expr. of extravagance*
(d)  Vowel change in the second syllable of the echoed part.
This change takes place only in one word.
kuṭuṭuṭā  *Hookah as producing a gurgle*
(e)  Vowel lengthening in the echoed word.

In these words there is no change in the quality of the vowels but only the quantity is changed. This takes place in the second syllable in 3 words.

tantuṃeṅal  *Expr. of beating time*
kokkočenāl  *Expr. of cackling, clucking*
palapāḷā  *Word expression ‘no’*

Echo Words

(2)  Consonant Change

The initial consonant is changed when echoed in the words of this category. Out of the five words in this section the bilabial consonantal phonemes p or m occurs in 4 words initially in the echoed part.

kaṭapaṭaṇeṅal  *Metaphysical Jargon*
kimaccimavenāl  *Muttering*
calamalavaka  *Confused by*
tatapataṇal  *Expr. of patting sound; tottering*
tantumantu  *Confusion*

(3)  Consonant plus vowel change

The initial consonant along with the following vowel i.e. the initial syllable itself is changed in the words of this category. Most of the words have the bilabial consonantal phonemes initially in the echoed part followed by the back rounded vowels u or o. They are 48 in number out of 51 words where consonant plus vowel change takes place.

kakkipikkaveṅal  *Expr. of blinking in confusion blabbering*

kacumuceṅal  *Whispering into the ear*
kaṭamuteṅal  *Rattling: rumbling in the bowels*
kaṭumuteṅal  —do—
katumuteṅal  —do—
katalametalavoṭṭutal  *To allow, to move about*
kappuccippeṅal  *Phrase signifying the keeping of perfect silence*
kalamoleṅal  *Chattering*
kalukkumoluṅkeṇal  *Fatty appearance*
kilumoleṅal  *Signifying buzzing humming sound*
kiccumuccenāl  —do—
kiccumuccenāl  *Noisiness as of housefull of children*
kiyomayovenal
kutilakkumalkkenal
kokkumakkku
kongamapavenal
kolamalavenal
cataputtalal
cattuputtegal
carakkuppurakegal
calarpilaregal
calukkupylukkenal
callipilovenrittal
calakkupulakkenal
calakkupulakkenal
calitupulalenal
calamalavaka
cililuplegenal
cililuplegenal
cittupputtegal
takkupukku
takkupukkegal
takkapikkavenal
takkapiikkavenal	takutapikkatavenal
takkupokkegal
tacumpucumeagal

Onomatopoeia in Tamil

'Screaming as children or young people'
'Expr. signifying being fleshy and rounded'
'Juggling'
'signifying confusion and disorderliness'

—to do—
'To make a cracking sound';
to be in ordinally hasty'
'signifying haste'
'Creaking sound as of shoes'
'Signifying clinking as of ornaments'

—to do—
'To move freely and familiarly,'
'Splashing sound'

—to do—
'Growling with anger'
'Confusedly'
'To be mashy as over boiled rice'
'Bubbling as boiling water'
'Short, quick breathing'
' premiere device, trickery'

'Expr. of repeated thumping sound'
'Expr. of being usually disorderly improper, awkward'
'Awkward'
'Ranting; blustering'
'Expr. of repeated thumping sound'
'Expr. signifying loose hanging of garments on a person'

Echo Words

tatapatanagal
'teep. of patting sound; tottering'
t呵护ugar
—do—
tataputtegal
'teep. of blustering; scolding'
tatapututtaal
'To be hasty'
tattapittavenal
'Wobbing as of a child'
tattakkapittakavenal
—do—
tattakkapittakakuttatal
'A game in which one tries to strike another's hand and the other draws it back evading the blow'
tantumantu
'signifying confusion'
tamakumma
'Expr. signifying delight; enjoyment'
tattuppu nanagal
'Expr. of being angry; being pompous'
tattuppoittu
'Confusion; perplexity'
titipotanagal
'An expression of being, angry'
titupinenal
'Expr. of falling etc.'
nacapicattal
'To waver'
narukkupirukkal
'Rice partially cooked'

(4) Addition of consonants.

When the word begins with a vowel a consonant comes in initially in the echoed part. Here also out of 7 occurrences 4 have bilabials added initially.

atiaakkapputtaikka
'alaiikamalaaka
'alolakallolam
'ajayulay
'atapaatavenal
'iraatupirittu
'ekkacakakkam

'Hurriedly'
'To be wilder'
'Great noise'
'Hasty action'
'A form of respectful greeting and salutation among Muslims'
'Quarrel scuffle'
'Confusion; disorder'
ii. The free words of the previous section, viz., the complete onomatopoetic words, neither of the parts occurs in isolation. There is also another type. The first part is a free word which occurs in isolation. Here the second or reduplicated part is motivated by the phonetic form of this free word. It is similar in form to the free word,

(1) Vowel change.

Only one example is found in this section. Mid vowel is changed into a high vowel. The word *keśu* ‘to spoil’ is followed by the echoed part *kēśu* plus the verbal noun suffix *ttaal*. The meaning of the whole expression is ‘to be utterly ruined.’

It cannot be brought under (C) V—K— because in this type a suffix cannot be added commonly at the end but it should be added separately with each part.

*ketukaṭṭutal* ‘To be utterly ruined’

(2) Consonant Change.

Here also the predominant consonant that occurs initially in the echoed part is bilabial. They are 7 in number out of 9.

*kuṭṭumutṭu* ‘Combination and cooperation of persons for affecting an object’
*canṭumunutu* ‘Narrow street, confusion’
*cāṭimāṭaiyāy* ‘By hint; slightly’
*cāyalmāyālay* —
*cikkalpikkal* ‘Complication’
*cikkuppikku* —
*clintipinti* ‘Shred; shattered bit’
*nappu cappu* ‘Taste; property; possessions’
*pākkicakki* ‘A little extra quality’

(3) Consonant plus vowel change.

The bilabial consonantal phoneme m or p occupies the initial position of the echoed word and it is followed mostly by back vowels. They are 17 in number.

*açaṭṭupicaṭṭeṇal* ‘Behaving foolishly’
*aṭṭiṭi* ‘Quarrel that ends in blows’
*aṭṭiracattiram* ‘Missiles and weapons’
*aṭṭimantikaṭṭi* ‘Evening twilight’
*aṃalikumàṭi* ‘Great uproar’
*aṭṭipasti* ‘Property’
*aṇamaṇeṇal* ‘Small gift’
*aṇoṇaṇoṇeṇal* ‘State of being indifferent’
*ōṭṭačāṭṭam* ‘Hurry and bustle’
iii. The free word in the second part.

The echoed word in this section belongs to the first part and the free word to the second. Here the echoed part is proposed to the free word.

(1) Consonant + Vowel change.

Kōga is the echoed word of the free word māgam and it comes as attribute to pillai. This is the only case where one gets consonant plus vowel change.

kōmamagnappillai ‘A marriage ceremony in which the bride presents the bridegroom with a doll representing a child which he returns to her.

(2) Loss of consonants.

Contrary to the echoed word with the free word as the first part, in these words the initial consonant of the free word is lost when echoed. There are 8 such words in this section.

akkampakkam ‘This way and that way’
ajaṭattāḷai ‘Unsteady swaying to and fro’
agakapāgakka ‘With flurry’
aratimarati ‘Forgetfulness’
ācakupācakka ‘Awkward predicament’
āttikuppoffiti ‘Contradiction merely for the sake of contradiction’
αnaikkukkōǥai —do—

From the semantic point of view it is possible to make a distinction between primary and secondary onomatopoeia. ‘Its [Primary-onomatopoeia’s] 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’. These are different from the ‘words which are having no direct relationship with the sound. The sound might have struck a listener at one time or from one feature of that object. But it is not its prominent feature’. Primary onomatopoeia is determined by its imitative nature. Here a note of caution is needed. The sound imitated will not express fully the sound of the thing which it represents. Imitation is not only objective but also subjective. The same sound is heard and expressed differently by different speakers. For example to indicate the ringing of the bell many expressions are found in Tamil: kāṭir, kipta, kinnir, kipal. The barking of the dog is expressed as loj or val. Many examples can be cited to elucidate this point. So it is clear that,

i) The imitative expressions do not represent the natural sound hundred percent.

ii) The imitative expressions vary from person to person and so there are numerous expressions for a single natural
