

## ONOMATOPOEIC SIGNIFICANCE OF PARTICULAR SOUNDS

There are onomatopoeic expressions which are similar in form but with a single difference of vowels or consonants. In those cases this particular difference of a vowel or a consonant gives two different onomatopoeic values. Such contrasting sounds have to be taken as having onomatopoeic significance. This contrast is found in quality and quantity of vowels and consonants.

### (i) Contrast in the quality of the vowel.

The alternation between u and i, u and e, u and a gives two different meanings of the onomatopoeic expressions which are otherwise similar in form.

|              |   |
|--------------|---|
|              | u—i   |
| kuḷukuḷuttal | 'Boiling'   |
| kuḷikuḷittal | 'To be delivered of a child'                          |
|              | u—e   |
| cūcūveṇal    | 'Silencing urging dogs to attack'                     |
| cēcēyeṇal    | 'Expr. of contempt, used in driving<br>as of animals' |
|              | u—a   |
| muḡumuḡuttal | 'To murmur'   |
| muḡamuḡattal | 'To become rough'                                     |

|              |                   |
|--------------|-------------------|
| morumoruttal | 'To murmur'       |
| moramorattal | 'To rustle rough' |
| morumoruttal | 'To murmur'       |
| moramorattal | 'To rustle rough' |

## (ii) Contrast in the quantity of the vowel.

The alternation between short and long *a* makes the words different.

|          |  |
|----------|--|
| paḷapaḷa | 'Glittering'                               |
| paḷāpaḷā | 'Word ironically expressing fine or bravo' |

## (iii) Contrast in the quality of the consonant.

The alternation between *p* and *m*, *r* and *ṛ*, *l* and *ḷ* gives different meanings as given below. So these consonants are significant in expressing a particular onomatopoeic sense.

|               |   |
|---------------|---|
| p—m           |   |
| koppēṇal      | 'Moving quickly'                            |
| kommeṇal      | 'Expression denoting luxuriance'            |
| cappēṇal      | 'Insipidity'                                |
| cammeṇal      | 'Majestic bearing'                          |
| cuppēṇal      | 'Signifying the quick absorption of liquid' |
| cummeṇal      | 'Breathing'                                 |
| toppeṇal      | 'Falling with a thumping noise'             |
| tommeṇal      | 'Expr. of drum beat'                        |
| tapatapaveṇal | 'Quick succession'                          |
| tamatamaveṇal | 'Cracking roaring sound as of burning fire' |

|              |   |
|--------------|---|
| r—ṛ          |   |
| naṛunaṛuttal | 'Grinding the teeth'                        |
| naṛunaṛuttal | 'To feel grit in the mouth along with food' |
| neṛuneṛuttal | 'Grinding the teeth'                        |
| neṛuneruttal | 'To feel sudden pain as in the stomach'     |

|               |   |
|---------------|---|
| neṛukkeṇal    | 'Snapping sound'  |
| nerukkeṇal    | 'Suddenness'  |
| muṛamuṛappu   | 'Cleanliness, roughness'                                      |
| muramurappu   | 'Foaming crackling in the mouth'                              |
| l—ḷ           |   |
| maḷamaḷattal  | 'Smoothness softness'   |
| maḷamaḷattal  | 'To crash rattle'   |
| maḷamaḷattal  | 'To produce the sound of buffling or flowing abundantly'      |
| ḷ—l           |   |
| vaḷavaḷappu   | 'Slipperiness smoothness'                                     |
| vaḷavaḷappu   | 'Talkativeness'   |
| ḷ—l           |   |
| koḷḷēṇal      | 'Signifying the sound of a drum or other musical instruments' |
| kollēṇal      | 'Per. an outburst of laughter'                                |
| paḷapaḷaveṇal | 'Glittering'  |
| paḷapaḷaveṇal | 'Sounding chirping'   |
| caḷacaḷappu   | 'Babbling, splashing as of rain'                              |
| calacaḷappu   | 'To rustle; to be talking incessantly'                        |

## (iv) Contrast in the quantity of the consonant.

The alternation between single *k*, *c* and double *kk*, *cc* respectively 'makes the onomatopoeic words into two different words. Some times the addition of a consonant also makes a difference in meaning.

|                   |                             |
|-------------------|-----------------------------|
| e.g. kiṭukiteṇal  | 'Signifying rumbling sound' |
| kiṭukkikiṭukkeṇal | 'Signifying hallow sound'   |

The addition of a consonant due to sandhi also makes the semantic difference.

|                |                                      |
|----------------|--------------------------------------|
| e.g. kūkūveṇal | 'Bawling' screeching'                |
| kūkkūveṇal     | 'Signifying crowing sound of a cock' |

|               |  |
|---------------|--|
| k—kk          |  |
| tikutikeṇal   | 'Expr. of rapid kindling of fire'                      |
| tikkutikkeṇal | 'Expr. throbbing or beating of the heart through fear' |



|               |                                    |
|---------------|------------------------------------|
| pukupukēṇal   | 'Expr. of gushing out as water'    |
| pukkupukkeṭal | 'Expr. of crackling sound of fire' |
| c—cc          |                                    |
| kacukacēṇal   | 'Damp moist to the touch'          |
| kaccukaccēṇal | 'Expr. of babbling interminably'   |
| nacunacēṇal   | 'Damp moist'                       |
| naccunaccēṇal | 'Troubling'                        |

(v) Free variation in the quality of the vowel.

Contrary to the contrasting alternations mentioned above there are alternations which do not make any difference in meaning. These are just free varying forms. The same onomatopoeic sense is expressed by both the alternating sounds.

There is free variation between u and a, u and e, u and o, e and a, a and i, e and o, i and u. These variations do not affect the onomatopoeic value of the words.

|               |   |
|---------------|---|
| u~a           |   |
| itukkumuṭukku | 'Specious objection narrow corner, difficult circumstances' |
| itakkumuṭukku | —do—  |
| itakkumaṭukku | —do—  |
| kaṭumuṭēṇal   | 'Rattling, rumbling as the bowels'                          |
| kaṭamuṭēṇal   | —do—  |
| kolukoluttal  | 'To become loose; deranged in parts'                        |
| kolakolattal  | —do—  |
| cantumuntu    | 'narrow street, confusion'                                  |
| cantumantu    | —do—  |
| toṇutoṇuppu   | 'Chattering, babbling'                                      |
| toṇatoṇappu   | —do—  |
| nacunacuppu   | 'Towater, to be continually drizzling'                      |
| nacanacappu   | —do—  |
| neṇuneruttal  | 'Grinding the teeth'  |
| neṇanerattal  | —do—  |

|                         |  |
|-------------------------|--|
| mokumokeṇal             | 'Expr. of boiling gurling sound as of water poured from a narrow neck of vessel' |
| mokamokeṇal             | 'Expr. of boiling gurling sound as of water poured from a narrow neck of vessel' |
| muṇumuṇuppu             | To murmur  |
| muṇamuṇappu             | —do—   |
| muṇumuṇuppu             | 'Cleanliness; roughness, stiffness as of washed cloth'                           |
| muṇamuṇappu             | —do—   |
| viṭuviṭēṇal             | 'Expr. of being busy, trembling in fear, cold etc.'                              |
| viṭaviṭēṇal             | —do—   |
| u~e                     |  |
| taḷḷumuḷḷu              | 'Scuffle pulling and pushing'  |
| taḷḷumellu              | —do—   |
| u~o                     |  |
| tuṇatuṇattal            | 'To worry with ceaseless talk'   |
| toṇatoṇattal            | —do—   |
| e~a                     |  |
| neṇaneṇēṇal             | 'Grinding the teeth'   |
| naṇanaṇēṇal             | —do—   |
| a~i                     |  |
| paṭāreṇal               | 'Expr. signifying cracking or bursting noise'                                    |
| paṭireṇal               | 'Expr. signifying cracking or bursting noise'                                    |
| e~o                     |  |
| keruṭṭukkeruṭṭe-<br>ṇal | —do—   |
| korattukorattēṇal       | —do—   |
| neḷḷēṇal                | 'An imitative sound'   |
| nollēṇal                | —do—   |
| peṭṭēṇal                | 'Expr. signifying suddenness'  |
| poṭṭēṇal                | —do—   |

i~u

kuṭikuṭi 'Hookah as producing a gurgle'

kuṭukuṭu —do—

timitimiyēṇal 'Repeated sound in succession'

timutimuvēṇal —do—

(vi) Free variation in the quantity of the vowel.

The free variation between short and long i or a does not make any semantic difference of the onomatopoeic words.

kiccukiccuttam- 'Child's game of finding out a small

palam stick hidden in a ridge of sand'

kiccukiccuttam- —do—

palam

takkapikkavēṇal 'Expr. of being usually disorderly improper or awkward'

takkāpikkavēṇal —do—

(vii) Free variation in the quality of the consonant.

There is free variation between p and m, c and j, ṭ and t, ṭ and ḷ, t and l, ṇ. l and r, ṛ and r. These variations do not make any semantic difference.

p~m

ṭapaṭapavēṇal 'The sound of a drum'

ṭamaṭamavēṇal —do—

taḷḷuppullu 'Scuffle pulling and pushing'

tāḷḷumullu —do—

c~j

cilleṇal 'Chilliness'

jilleṇal —do—

ṭ~t

alternation.

coṭṭēṇal 'Sound as that of a coconut falling on the ground'

cotteṇal —do—

t~l

maṭāreṇal 'Expr. signifying crashing noise'

majāreṇal —do—

t~l

metteṇal 'Expr. signifying being smooth or soft'

melleṇal —do—

n~l~r

kiṇiṇēṇal 'Expr. signifying ringing sound'

kiṇiḷēṇal —do—

kiṇiṛēṇal —do—

l~r

kupiḷēṇal 'Burning fiercely, rushing suddenly'

kupiṛēṇal —do—

calacalappu 'rustling as of starched cloth'

caracarappu —do—

carēḷēṇal 'Suddenness, haste'

carēṛēṇal —do—

pakileṇal 'Expr. signifying the state of being greatly terrified'

pakireṇal —do—

ṛ~r

kiṛiṇṇiṭu 'Creaking sound'

kiṛiṇṇiṭu —do—

cuṛucuṛuttal 'Rapid burning as combustibles'

cuṛucuṛuttal —do—

tuṛutuṛuppu 'Restlessness, impatience'

tuṛutuṛuppu —do—

paṛapaṛappu 'Burring noise, haste'

paṛapaṛappu —do—

paṛakuparakeṇal 'Scratching sound'

paṛakuparakeṇal —do—

moṛamoṛappu 'Rustling'

moṛamoṛappu —do—

(viii) Free variation in the quantity of the consonant.

The free variation between short and long k, c, ḷ, l and v does not make the onomatopoeic words different.

k~kk

icakupicaku 'Awkward predicament'

icakkupicakku —do—



|                 |  |
|-----------------|--|
| c~cc            |  |
| kīcukīcēṇal     | 'Chirping as of birds'   |
| kīccukīccēṇal   | —do—   |
| k~kk            |  |
| cukṛēṇal        | 'Rustling as of palmyra leaves;<br>spreading fire'                     |
| cukṛkṛēṇal      | —do—   |
| l~ll            |  |
| molumolēṇal     | 'Expr. signifying noisy clamour'                                       |
| mollumollēṇal   | —do—   |
| l~ll            |  |
| ciḷupulēṇal     | 'Expr. of bubbling as boiling water'                                   |
| ciḷupulḷēṇal    | —do—   |
| y~vv            |  |
| lavālavāvēṇal   | 'Expr. being distressed or knocked<br>about in life, crying in sorrow' |
| lavvālavvāvēṇal | —do—   |

It is to be noted here that there is no contrast between the alternating sounds atleast in some dialects of the spoken Tamil. For example *ṛ* and *r*, *l* and *ḷ*, *ḷ* and *l* have merged in some dialects. *u* when followed by *a* in the second syllable becomes *o* in spoken Tamil. Therefore these variations can be taken as dialect variations. But there are the other variations which have to be taken into account as variations which do not have onomatopoeic significance.

But curiously the same sounds which contrast and give two different meanings are in free variation without affecting the meaning. This can be found out by comparing the list of sounds given as in contrast or in free variation. Therefore the contrast or free variation is not with reference to those particular sounds but with reference to the particular onomatopoeic expressions.

## (ix) Different forms for one conception

In the cases above mentioned, there is a difference of only one sound and this difference does not change the meaning. There are expressions which are quite different in form but they mean the same thing. They have been listed below. As already pointed out under Imitatives, it shows that even the phonetically motivated words are subjective to some extent and one and the same conception is experienced and expressed differently.

|                    |  |
|--------------------|--|
| kiṅkiṇēṇal         | 'Expr. signifying tinkling sound'                      |
| kiṇukkukkiṇukkeṇal | —do—   |
| kīkkiyēṇal         | 'Chirping as of birds'                                 |
| kīccukīccēṇal      | —do—   |
| kuṛukuṛuppu        | 'Activeness'   |
| kuṛutuṛuppu        | —do—   |
| calārcalāreṇal     | 'Signifying clinking as of ornaments'                  |
| calārpilāreṇal     | —do—   |
| calukkupillukkeṇal | —do—   |
| caḷakkuccaḷakkeṇal | 'Splashing sound'                                      |
| caḷakkuppulakkeṇal | —do—   |
| caḷakkuppulakkeṇal | —do—   |
| cikkaṭimukkaṭi     | 'Complication'   |
| cikkalpikkal       | —do—   |
| cikku pikku        | —do—   |
| ciliriṭu           | 'Being chill of getting the goose<br>skin'             |
| cillitu            | —do—   |
| ciḷuḷēṇal          | 'Expr. of bubbling as boiling water'                   |
| ciḷupulēṇal        | —do—   |
| ṭamāreṇal          | 'Crashing sound as of the breaking<br>of earthen pots' |
| ṭammenal           | —do—   |
| tāntimenal         | 'Expr. of music sound,<br>Expr. of extra vagance'      |
| tāntomenal         | —do—   |
| ṭāmṭomenal         | —do—   |

|                    |  |
|--------------------|--|
| tikkuttikkēṇal     | 'Throbbing or beating of the heart through fear'               |
| tiṭukkuttiṭukkēṇal | —do—   |
| tiṭutiṭēṇal        | —do—   |
| tiṭireṇal          | 'Expr. of falling etc.,'                                       |
| tiṭutippēṇal       | —do—   |
| tonaṭonuppu        | 'Clattering, babbling'   |
| tonuṭonuppu        | —do—   |
| nerēlēṇal          | 'Suddenness'   |
| nerukkēṇal         | —do—   |
| nerukkattiyeṇal    | —do—   |
| pokkēṇal           | 'Expr. signifying suddenness or abruptness'                    |
| pocukkēṇal         | —do—   |
| poṭukkēṇal         | —do—   |
| poṭṭēṇal           | —do—   |
| pommēṇal           | —do—   |
| porēlēṇal          | —do—   |
| porukkēṇal         | —do—   |
| pollēṇal           | —do—   |
| porēṇal            | —do—   |
| maḷālēṇal          | 'Expr. signifying cracking; crashing'                          |
| maḷārttiyeṇal      | —do—   |
| maḷukkēṇal         | —do—   |
| veḷēlēṇal          | 'Expr. becoming clear; dawning of the dog'                     |
| veḷlēṇal           | —do—   |
| veṛicceṇal         | 'Expr. being empty or vacant as a place devoid of inhabitants' |
| veṛlēṇal           | —do—   |

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