The palatal ŋ in Tamil

An attempt is made here to analyse the various changes the palatal sound ŋ has undergone from the earliest times to the present.

Several other sounds in Tamil, this sound occurs in words intervocally and finally. The analysis presented here forms a study of it in all the three positions in which it occurs.

**Initial.**

Tolkāppiyam, the earliest grammar of the Tamil language, mentions the nasal ŋ can occur initially in words only when it is combined with the vowels ā, e and o. When we examine the Sangam Texts, which are the earliest available literary works in Tamil, we come across the following examples to illustrate the statement of Tolkāppiyam:

- man yāṭṭa "besmeared with mud" lit. "joined to the earth"
- pēn yāṭṭa "decorated with gold" lit. "joined to gold"

The commentators give the following examples to illustrate this change occurs only in verbs. For instance a phrase man ŋāmai "damming up with earth" will not become man ŋāmai since ŋ is a noun.

This is perhaps due to the fact that immediately before the time of Tolkāppiyam, the initial syllable ŋ—of a considerable number of verbs might have changed to yā—. But in the time of Tolkāppiyam when this syllable immediately preceded by a nasal, it resumed its original nasal form —a change of ŋ—into yā—which originally occurred in verbs seems to have been extended later on to nouns also.

In the early works called Pernikattai, which is supposed to belong to the 7th A.D., the form nāṭi is found for the word yāṭṭu "lute," in one place. The Sangam Texts occasionally the word nāṭu is used in the sense of "my wife"; there is also another word yāṭu used in the sense of "my mind."

In these two examples the form yāṭu might have come from ŋāṭu—change of ŋ—into yā—. There is also another word yāṭu used in the sense of "my mind."

This word may be split up as ŋāṭi + ar. ŋāṭu has been originally a noun of place, and ar an expletive affixed to it. ŋāṭu might have changed to yā—, and the form yāṭu might have changed to ŋāṭu—change of ŋ—into yā—.

Also in the Sangam Texts words are found wherein ŋ comes initial in combination with the vowels a and i.

**Inter-vocalically.**

- ānāma "world" (Kali. 124)
- ānāpi "battle-field" (Kurial. 1088)
- ānāvil "baston" (Pāṭṭi. 288)
- ānāyyu "sun" (Pāṭṭi. 88)
- ānāru "day" (Kali. 37)
- ānāal "cassea sophora" (Pāṭṭi. 51)
- ānākar "there" (Kali. 50)
- ānāy "bow-string" (Pūram. 14)
- ānālu "to hang down" (Pūram. 82)
- ŋiē "fire-brand" (Aham. 168)
- ŋiēṭu "crab" (Aham. 176)
- ŋiēti "to rub" (Pūram. 247)
- ŋiēṭal "road" (Pāṭṭi. 15)
- ŋiēmi "a kind of tree" (Aham. 395)
- ŋiēmiṇu "to be pressed" (Aham. 58)
- ŋiēmiṇku "to press hard" (Aham. 60)
- ŋiēmīr "to spread" (Netgu. 90)
- ŋiēmil "to become loose" (Kali. 73)
- ŋiēmilu "to become weak" (Aham. 31)

Also in the Sangam Texts words are found wherein ŋ comes initial in combination with the vowels a and i.

**Final.**

- ānāmar "to spread" (Pūram. 90)
- ānāmali "dog" (Pāṭṭi. 140)
- ānāral "to sound" (Pāṭṭi. 30)
- ŋiēṭam "flesh" (Pūram. 177)
- ŋiēmīr “bee” (Pūram. 93)

1. Tol. El. cūt. 64.
resulted. With the change of form there seems to have been a change of meaning also, and unlike anku, yānku began to denote "where" or "which". Again, by the elision of the initial y—, a new form anku meaning "where" has resulted. anku is mostly found in poetry; but the more common form is anku, which again may be a development from anku formed by the shortening of the initial vowel a—.

Also, the syllable yā— occurring initially seems to have had a tendency to change into e—. This appears to be an early tendency found in Dravidian languages. For example, the form yānku "where" in Tamil has a parallel form hege in Kannada, meaning "where". This change appears to have taken place in Tamil, not only in the language used in the Sangam literature, but also in the language of later times. Therefore it may not be safe to assume that the form of the personal pronoun used in the pre-Tolkappiyam period might have been *ānū; it was probably from this form and nān developed.

It will be shown later that in the language used in the Sangam literature a pronunciation *ā— occurring initially had already become dental n—in a good many words. On closer examination this change appears to have begun during the period of Tolkappiyam itself, because Tolkappiyam refers to a form of the plural of the personal pronoun along with the form yām. It is not just as the form yām came from nāp, so also the plural form yām came from a form *ānām which might have existed in pre-Tolkappiyam. This is a form like this existed is proved by the existence in modern Tamil, the form *ūnāl "we." This form is perhaps a development with the addition of a suffix al. Also, just as the singular form developed from nāp, the plural form nām might have come from the form nām is mentioned in Tolkappiyam along with the parallel form its plural yām. But the singular form nān belonging to it is not there; nor is it found used in the Sangam literature. This may be due to the fact that nān might have been supposed to be less literary to be found used in the colloquial literature, and therefore it might have remained only in the colloquial Tamil.

This appears to have remained in that condition till it was used in the language of the 7th Century A.D.14 In this connection it is useful to know that the following Dravidian languages have forms beginning with the dental n— for the personal pronoun which are identical with the form nān in Tamil:

- Telugu: nān-ū, ū
- Kannada: nān-ū, ū
- Coorg: nān'

3. Perhaps identical with kal which is found in the Tamil form nān. kal "we." See Appar: Tirumār 13:1.
The following have forms beginning with the dental *n-* for the personal pronoun, plural, which are identical with the form *nan* in Tamil:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Singular</th>
<th>Plural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Malayalam</td>
<td>nām, nām, nannāl, nānnāl</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kannada</td>
<td>nān-uu</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tulu</td>
<td>nānaa</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coorg</td>
<td>nānaa</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kota</td>
<td>nānic</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rajmahāl</td>
<td>nānu</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urādun</td>
<td>nānu</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Further, it has been shown before that the syllable *yā-* coming into the *e-* form changes itself into *e-* if this is correct, then it must be assumed that the forms *yānu* and *yām* were used as oblique forms of the personal pronouns developed from the form *yānu* and *yām* respectively. At first these forms in *e-* might have been used as personal pronouns in the same way as *yānu* and *yām* were used. But in course of time, as there were two sets of forms for the same purpose they reserved one set for one use and the other for another. Thus, they began to use *yānu* and *yām*, in the nominative whereas the set in *e-* was used in the oblique cases.  

The personal pronominal forms in *e-* are still used in some of the Dravidian languages in the nominative.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Singular</th>
<th>Plural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Telugu</td>
<td>en-u, ḫ</td>
<td>en-u</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coorg</td>
<td>. . . .</td>
<td>enga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuda</td>
<td>. . . .</td>
<td>ēnu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kota</td>
<td>. . . .</td>
<td>ēne</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rajmahāl</td>
<td>en</td>
<td>em</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urādun</td>
<td>en</td>
<td>em</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

15. Further, it has been already shown that the initial *y-* of the syllable *yā-* times disappears. The same principle seems to have been at work in connection with this personal pronoun in some of the Dravidian languages.

The following languages have preserved the *y-* and hence have the form *yānu* the personal pronoun singular:

Kannada   yānu
Tulu       yānu

Out of the other Dravidian languages only Tulu has the plural form *yēnānu* corresponding to the Tamil form *yām*, in which the initial *y-* is preserved.

But in some other languages the initial *y-* of *yānu* and *yām* is dropped.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Singular</th>
<th>Plural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kannada</td>
<td>ḫ</td>
<td>ḫ-u, ḫ-u</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ke</td>
<td>ḫ-u, ḫ-u</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuda</td>
<td>ḫ</td>
<td>ḫ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kota</td>
<td>ēne</td>
<td>ēne</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Palatal Ñ in Tamil

Tolkappiyam, as Tolkappiyam states that words do not end in the syllable
There is a change in which the suffix -ñr occurs intervocally.

The suffixes -ñr and -ñr. occur intervocally.

Intervocalic.

In the following example -ñr- occurring between two vowels remains with
any change:

ulñtrai “balloon vine” (Tol. Porul. 64).

The -ñr in this example was probably a long consonant, which
occurred intervocally in the time of Tolkappiyam. The older
form of this word is found in Malayalam as ulñtrai.

In the following example intervocalic -ñr- changes into -y-:

añar “mental disorder,” or “laziness” (Poruna. 99): ayar-vu (Pun. 182).

In the following examples -ñr occurs as the initial sound of a suffix
ñr.16 When this suffix comes after a word ending in a vowel, the -ñr changes
into y.

ilñtrai-ñr “young lads” (Mullai. 36): ilñtrai-yar (Tol. Porul. 193)

viñtrai-ñr “work-men” (Poruna. 100): viñtrai-ñr (Kurul. 329).

ñññr “drummer” (Pun. 377): ñññr-ñññr (Pu. V. M. 197).

ñññr “low-caste man”: ñññr-yar “gate-keeper” (Perumk. 327.52).

There are also examples in which -ñr becomes -v- under the same conditions.

añar “men of knowledge” (Kuriniçip. 18): añar “astrologer” (Kal. 39).


Out of these examples the word añar-ñarn might have been formed by
the addition of the pronomial suffix-ñr to the noun añar, in which case
the final-ñ of añarr disappears when the vowel a—of añar follows it. If
is correct, the form añar-nar must have come into existence later than the

16. The suffixes -ñr and -ñr may be split up into -ñ + an and -ñ + ar where are pronominal terminations.